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The Atlantic Monthly

NOVEMBER 2000

What Global Language ?

Don't
bet
on the
triumph
of English



by
**BARBARA
WALLRAFF**

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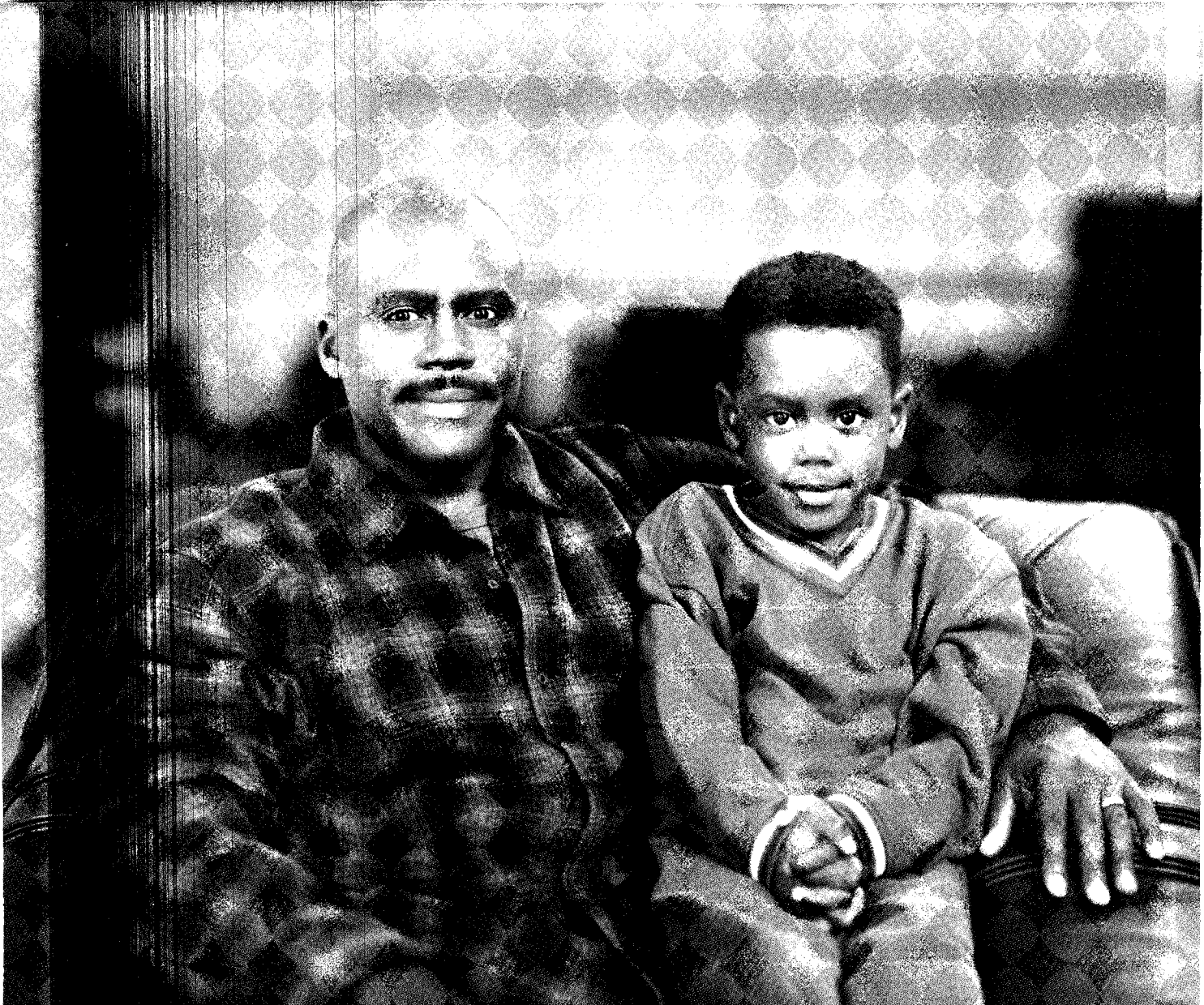
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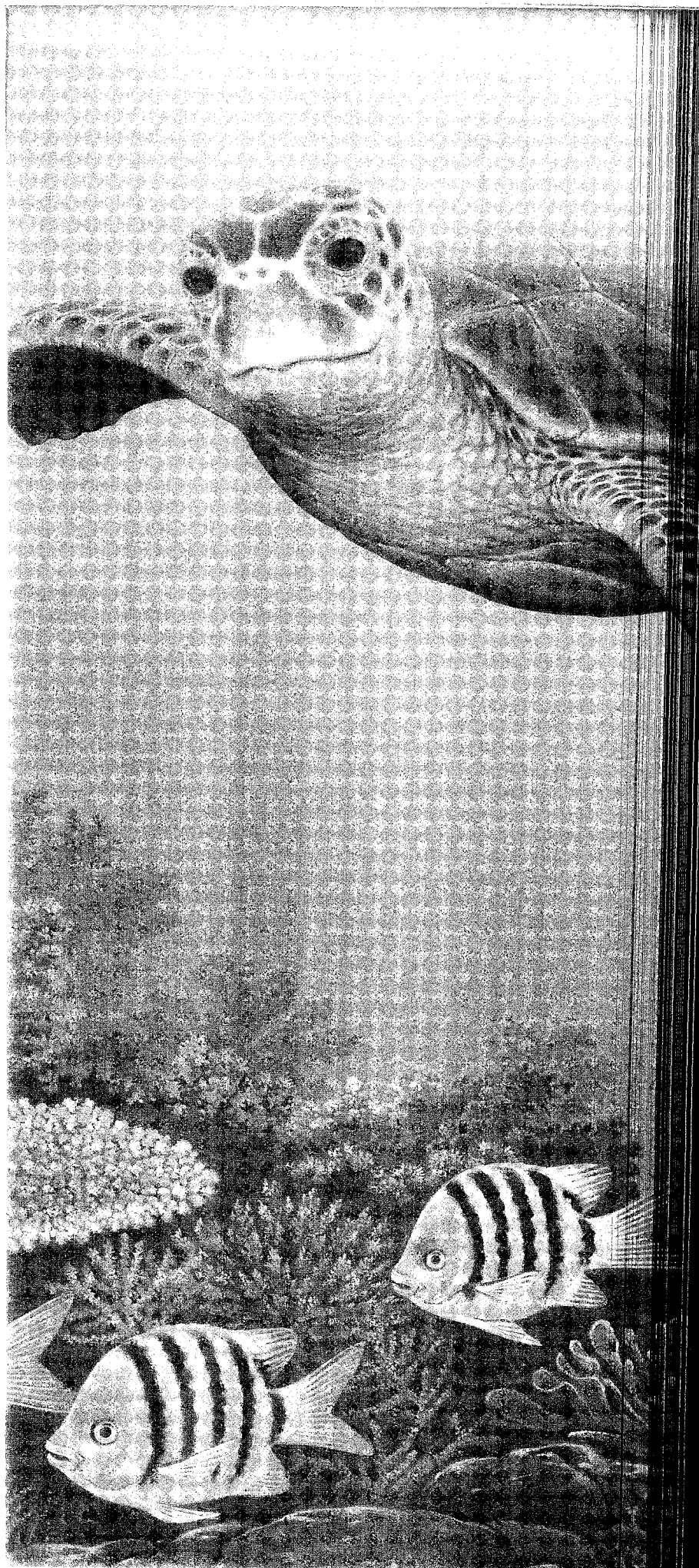
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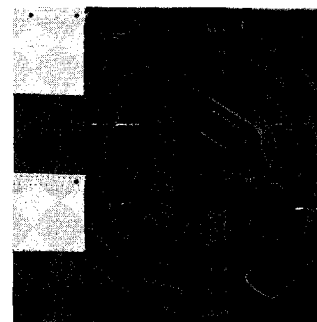




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“YEARS ago,” says Robert Vare, who recently joined *The Atlantic*’s staff as a senior editor, “I discovered that my abiding passion in magazines was writing that married the arts of journalism and storytelling. I love stories that make drama out of the observable world of real people, real places, and real events—setting scenes, depicting multidimensional characters, and, most of all, telling the tale.”

The genre known as narrative nonfiction has in some form always found a home in these pages, beginning with Nathaniel Hawthorne’s elegant Civil War dispatches. The modern form of the genre is exemplified by articles like William Langewiesche’s “The Shipbreakers,” which was last August’s cover story, and Eric Schlosser’s exploration of the devastated world of the families of murder victims, “A Grief Like No Other” (September, 1997).

Robert Vare, who will be helping to bring more of this kind of writing into the magazine, has been an editor and a writer for thirty years. He has served as articles editor of *The New Yorker* (1994–1996), articles editor of *The New York Times Magazine* (1990–1994), and assistant managing editor of *Rolling Stone* (1986–1990). While at the *Times Magazine* he

was the editor of the Pulitzer Prize–winning *Grady’s Gift*, Howell Raines’s memoir of growing up in the 1950s in racist Birmingham, Alabama. He was one of the two principal editors of the parody *Off The Wall Street Journal* (April Fools’ Day, 1982) and the editor and publisher of the *Playboy* magazine

parody *Playbore* (1983). He has been a comedy writer for movies and television, and his humor writing has appeared in many newspapers and magazines. Recently Vare has moved into the world of teaching. For the past three years he has taught narrative-nonfiction writing at Harvard University’s Nieman Foundation (where he was a Nieman fellow in 1996–1997), and this fall he is a visiting lecturer at Yale, again focusing on narrative nonfiction.

“General-interest magazines with national audiences used to be fertile breeding grounds

for this kind of writing,” Vare observes, “but most magazines today are far less hospitable to the narrative form. Their editors seem to have decided that readers now have neither the time nor the inclination to savor carefully developed narrative stories. But I’m a believer, and I’m willing to bet that readers will respond to true tales well told.” —THE EDITORS



CONTRIBUTORS

David Baker (“After Rain”) is a professor of English at Denison University. His latest book is *Heresy and the Ideal: On Contemporary Poetry* (2000).

Christopher Caldwell (“The Crescent and the Tricolor”) is the senior writer at *The Weekly Standard* and a columnist for *New York Press*. He writes regularly on books for *Slate*.

Paul Celan (1920–1970) (“There Was Earth Inside Them”) was born in Romania to German-speaking parents. **John Felstiner** is the author of *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (1995), and the editor and translator of *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, to be published by Norton this month.

Francis Davis (“Our Lady of Sorrows”) is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*.

Gregg Easterbrook (“Hybrid Vigor”) is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic* and a senior editor of both *The New Republic* and *Beliefnet.com*.

E. Marla Felcher (“Children’s Products and Risk”) is the author of *It’s No Accident: How Corporations Sell Dangerous Baby Products* (forthcoming).

David C. Holzman (“New Life for Old Cars”) writes about science, medicine, and cars. His work has appeared in *Smithsonian*, *The Washington Post*, and *Science*.

Robert D. Kaplan (“Where Europe Vanishes”) is a correspondent for *The Atlantic* and a senior fellow at the New America Foundation. His article in this issue will appear in somewhat different form in his book *Eastward to Tartary: Travels in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus*, to be published this month.

Christoph Niemann (cover art) is an illustrator who lives in New York and Germany. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New Yorker*. A book of his illustrations, *The Good Portrait*, was published in 1998.

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Rémy Rougeau (“Cello”) is a monk and a beekeeper in the upper Midwest. His first novel, *All We Know of Heaven*, will be published next spring.

Francine Russo (“From Iron Age to Our Age”) is a theater critic for *The Village Voice*.

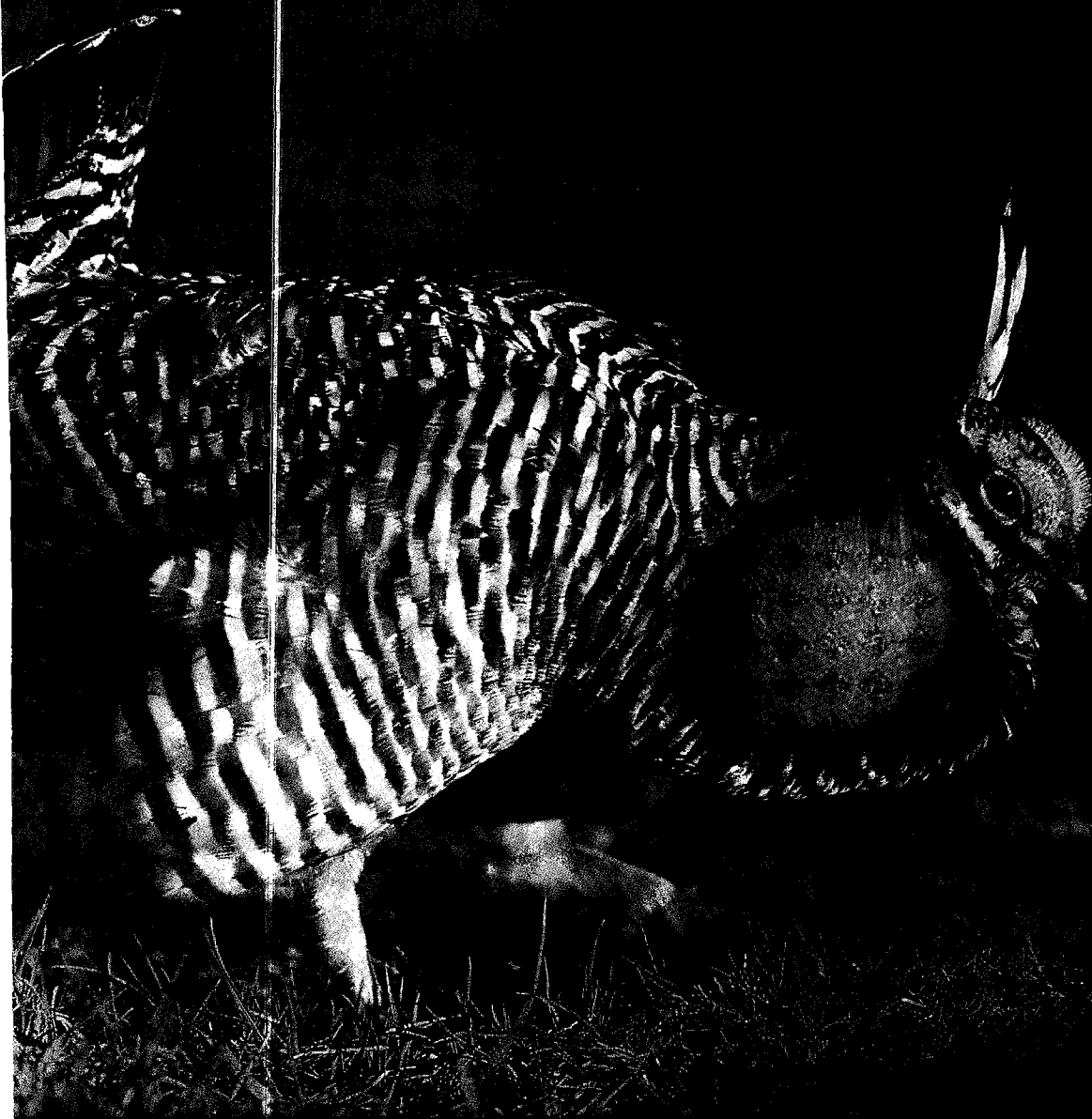
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John Updike (“Rainbow”) is the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of nineteen novels. His latest work, *Licks of Love: Short Stories and a Sequel*, “Rabbit Remembered,” will be published this month.

Barbara Wallraff (“What Global Language?”) is a senior editor of *The Atlantic* and the author of the book *Word Court* (2000), which grew out of her bimonthly *Atlantic* column of the same name.

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LETTERS

Laboratory Animals

Pet theft is a devastating crime that harms both animals and their owners ("From the Leash to the Laboratory," by Judith Reitman, July Atlantic). No animal owner should ever have to worry that his or her pet, if stolen, will end up in a research laboratory. Any dealer who knowingly sells stolen animals to research laboratories is acting not only illegally but also immorally. Unfortunately, Judith Reitman's article fails to accurately portray the efforts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to address this issue.

In the early 1990s we identified the use of stolen animals in research as a major problem and took action to deal with the source of this problem: Class B dealers trafficking in stolen cats and dogs. By 1995 we had put into place a policy—still in effect—that subjects Class B dealers who sell animals for research to quarterly inspections. Prior to 1995 they were often subject to only one inspection per year. We also began focusing greater attention on paperwork "tracebacks" of Class B dealer animals to their original owners. Contrary to Judith Reitman's comments, traceback records demonstrate that our efforts have paid off. In fiscal year 1993, when we performed random-sampling tracebacks of animals sold to research institutions, we were able to trace only 40 percent of the animals back to their original sources. By fiscal year 1999 we were able to trace back 93 percent.

We have also successfully and aggressively prosecuted those who violate the law. Since 1993 we have imposed more than \$520,000 in fines against licensed Class B random-source cat-and-dog dealers. Largely because of our agency's increased efforts to enforce the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), the number of Class B dealers has dropped significantly, from 104 in 1993 to twenty-eight. In 1997 we fined one Class B dealer operation \$175,000—the largest fine ever imposed by the animal-care program—and perma-

nently revoked the dealer's AWA license. The USDA is pursuing payment of this fine in full.

Craig A. Reed

Animal and Plant Health

Inspection Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Washington, D.C.

Judith Reitman's exposé of a black market in stolen pets is long on innuendo and short on facts. Her premise that pet dogs are regularly sold to medical-research facilities is a tired allegation that has repeatedly been refuted not only by enforcement authorities and laboratories but also by some knowledgeable animal-rights advocates. I find it interesting that nowhere in the piece does Reitman cite even one example of a stolen pet's being sold to a laboratory.

Reitman wrongly portrays the USDA as an agency unwilling or not able to carry out its duties while underreporting the extent of the "stolen-pet trade." The USDA deserves credit for the progress it has made in monitoring the activities of animal dealers and enforcing the Animal Welfare Act when rules are broken. Since 1993 the number of Class B dealers has fallen from more than a hundred to a record low of fewer than thirty.

Also contrary to Reitman's assertions, both the Foundation for Biomedical Research and its sister organization, the National Association for Biomedical Research, have always supported the vigorous enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act.

In informal surveys of animal-control departments in various states we have learned that although dog theft does occur to varying degrees, in virtually every case these animals were stolen for dogfighting or sport hunting. Surprisingly, this is the same conclusion reached last year by Animal People, one of the leading animal-protection newspapers in the United States. For the fourth straight year it could find no evidence of stolen pets' being sold to research facilities. Instead it confirmed its previous finding that "the 1990 Pet Theft Act amendments to the Animal Welfare



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Act appear to have virtually halted sales of stolen animals for laboratory use since taking effect in January 1992."

According to the most recent USDA figures, just over 76,000 dogs were used for biomedical research in 1998. Approximately 70 percent of these were bred specifically for research; the remaining animals were acquired from pounds—after efforts to locate their owners failed and euthanasia was the only remaining option—or bought from USDA-licensed and -regulated Class B dealers. Meanwhile, some four to six million dogs and cats are euthanized each year because no one wants them, according to the Humane Society of the United States.

The sad truth is that most missing dogs and cats simply run away. They are taken in by other people, killed on roadways, fatally injured by other animals, picked up by animal authorities and never claimed by their owners, or, yes, stolen and resold. But biomedical-research laboratories are one of the last places to look.

Frankie L. Trull

*Foundation for Biomedical Research
Washington, D.C.*

The theft of dogs for sale to medical-research laboratories is merely a symptom of research institutions' overall misrepresentation of their activities to the public. In an article published in the February, 1997, issue of *Scientific American*, Neal Barnard, M.D., and I explained how the animal models used in medical research typically differ fundamentally from the "analogous" human conditions in the mechanisms of disease induction, the diseases' natural history, and the effects of experimental manipulations. In short, data from animal models cannot be applied to human beings with reasonable confidence—something that animal researchers, who are well funded by public dollars, will not tell you. Human clinical investigation has been and will remain the main force behind medical progress; yet it remains sorely underfunded, owing to the political power of animal researchers.

Stephen R. Kaufman, M.D.

*Medical Research
Modernization Committee
Cleveland, Ohio*

Judith Reitman pinpoints a problem we're seeing on a regular basis in the Phoenix metropolitan area—neighborhood sweeps in which as many as two dozen family pets disappear from their own gated and walled-

in back yards on the same day—never to be seen again. It's stupefying . . . and heartbreaking.

Marilyn Shupe
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Judith Reitman replies:

Craig Reed's claim that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has a 93 percent success rate in random tracebacks is based on a very small sample. According to Ron DeHaven, the deputy administrator of the agency, random tracebacks are typically done for only three to five animals per dealer during each quarterly inspection. Some facilities hold hundreds of dogs. As I indicated, a random sampling of inspection reports shows that five of the largest dealers have had record-keeping violations. Some dealers have not even allowed inspectors on their premises.

Mr. Reed points to one instance, three years ago, in which a significant fine was imposed. In many other cases fines have been small. As I said in my article, in 1995 the Office of the Inspector General found that most of the fines APHIS collected during the previous year were \$300 or less—which dealers describe as the cost of doing business.

In my article I did not charge the Foundation for Biomedical Research or the National Association for Biomedical Research with failing to support the Animal Welfare Act. I did say that the association helped to defeat proposed congressional legislation intended to curb pet theft.

Ms. Trull is correct that the number of Class B dealers has fallen. As Mr. Reed notes in his letter, and as I noted in my article, the current number is twenty-eight. However, the number of bunchers supplying random-source dogs to Class B dealers has not, apparently, fallen.

Regarding Ms. Trull's position that most missing pets have simply run away and that virtually all stolen pets are taken for purposes other than research: I find it telling that APHIS itself, on its Web site, advises people whose pets are missing to approach animal dealers and research facilities in the hope of finding them there.

Global Warming

In "Breaking the Global-Warming Gridlock" (July *Atlantic*), Daniel Sarewitz and Roger Pielke Jr. make a number of interesting points about society's growing vulnera-

bility to climate and weather. In so doing, however, they unfairly mischaracterize environmentalists and scientists as sharing a single-minded interest in reducing greenhouse-gas emissions while neglecting the inevitable consequences of climate change.

It is true that most environmental organizations' climate campaigns center explicitly on measures and agreements to reduce greenhouse gases. Reducing greenhouse-gas emissions through the Kyoto Protocol and similar agreements remains the best way to prevent the worst scenarios relating to rising temperatures and sea levels.

But Sarewitz and Pielke do not acknowledge that environmental organizations have long been promoting policies aimed at making ecosystems and societies more resilient in the face of the kinds of stress expected from extreme weather events and climate change. Environmentalists support all the actions that the authors recommend to prevent destruction from floods, such as protecting forests and wetlands and curbing development on fragile coastlines. Environmentalists also advocate measures—among them conservation tillage, which reduces soil erosion—to ameliorate the effects of drought on soils. Although environmental groups have not always promoted these policies as “climate adaptation” measures, they have been pursuing them for decades—far longer than their emissions-reduction campaigns.

**Susan Subak
Elliot Negin**

*Natural Resources Defense Council
Washington, D.C.*

Sarewitz and Pielke give far too much importance to the fact that the U.S. Senate is opposed to the Kyoto Protocol. Senate opposition to this treaty or to some similar agreement is probably transitory. Flawed as the Kyoto Protocol may be, it is an important first step toward establishing a global structure that can restrain global carbon emissions. The authors are mistaken in saying that “the only nations likely to achieve the emissions commitments set under Kyoto are those, like Russia and Ukraine, whose economies are in ruins.” The UK, for one, seems on schedule to achieve its ambitious emissions reductions.

The authors seem to think that because the Kyoto treaty by itself will not halt global warming, it ought to be dismissed. They go on to say, “Even if greenhouse-gas emissions could somehow be rolled back to pre-industrial levels, the impacts of cli-

mate on society and the environment would continue to increase.” Obviously so, but that is certainly no reason to abandon critical efforts to curtail the excessive release of climate-disturbing gases into the atmosphere and thereby avert worsening an already perturbed climate.

John J. Berger
Point Richmond, Calif.

*Daniel Sarewitz and Roger Pielke Jr.
reply:*

We note with satisfaction that Susan Subak and Elliot Negin, of the Natural Resources Defense Council (a strong proponent of mandated emissions reductions), agree about the importance of reducing societal and environmental vulnerability to climate. Their agreement demonstrates the central political conclusion of our article: reducing vulnerability is a better organizing principle for action than reducing emissions. This common ground is of critical importance because, as we have shown, the impacts of climate are largely determined not by anthropogenic or other changes in the climate but by patterns of human development and environmental degradation.

John Berger's letter underscores the intractable character of the gridlock. On the one hand, even the most ambitious emissions-abatement goals cannot begin to address the world's climate problems. On the other, these goals are unlikely to be achieved. Contrary to Berger's assertion, a U.S. Department of Energy analysis released this year projects that UK carbon emissions will be about five percent higher in 2010 than they were in 1990. Berger may have been misled by a temporary decline in UK emissions during the 1990s. Ironically, this decline reflected the consequences of Thatcher-era policies aimed at breaking the power of the coal unions, not a commitment to global environmental stewardship. The UK's problems in meeting the Kyoto targets will be exacerbated by a 90 percent decline in government support for energy-technology research over the past twelve years.

Trademark

A note about “aspirin” (Word Court, by Barbara Wallraff, July *Atlantic*). The Bayer company, original manufacturers of Aspirin in Germany, did not lose their trademark through a failure to defend the name vigorously. After World War I the United

States demanded the trademark among its reparations—and the U.S. government deliberately let it go into the public domain so that other companies could use it. In the United States everyone can now manufacture aspirin.

In Canada the Bayer company still holds the trademark. Other companies that manufacture the drug must call it acetylsalicylic acid (or ASA).

Fred Kerner
Toronto, Ontario

Barbara Wallraff replies:

Fred Kerner is right that the aspirin story is more complicated than I was able to tell; Charles C. Mann and Mark L. Plummer explored it compellingly in these pages twelve years ago, in an article titled “The Big Headache.” The U.S. government did expropriate Bayer Aspirin's property, but promptly sold it, receiving \$5.3 million from the Sterling Products Company in 1918 for the business and the trademarks on *Aspirin* and *Bayer*. Litigation about the name Aspirin had, however, been under way in fits and starts since before the war. In 1921, to Sterling's dismay, Judge Learned Hand ruled that the name had indeed fallen into generic use in the United States, and the company lost that trademark.

Phoebe-Lou Adams

Phoebe-Lou Adams departing *The Atlantic*? It can't be possible! Although I knew she had been on the staff for many decades, I simply thought she would always be there for me to enjoy her pithy reviews and arch commentary. She seemed to be one of an increasingly rare breed of writers and reviewers who have a vast ken and the ability to make references and asides. Her writing, full of vim and vigor, was a delight to read, and she tantalized me to search for more and expanded my own range of literature and its myriad genres. She rarely let me down.

David Guyer
Chicago, Ill.

Alas, I have lived too long. Life without the monthly gleam from Phoebe-Lou Adams will be a darker prospect. But blessings on her for all the enlightenment she has so generously imparted this good while.

Robert L. Smith
Lovettsville, Va.

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Cricket

Thank you for Rob Nixon's most interesting article "As American as Cricket" (July *Atlantic*). I would like to correct one mistake: The one-day version of cricket was not invented in the late 1970s by "a maverick Australian entrepreneur." It was created in England in the early 1960s, and swiftly became very popular. The Australian television tycoon Kerry Packer revolutionized the sport in the 1970s by setting up World Series Cricket in competition with the official game. He attracted the world's best players with large sums of money (cricketers had been badly paid until then), put them in colored outfits, and introduced floodlit day/night cricket—innovations that have set the tone for one-day cricket ever since. English cricket lovers like me hope that the game will take off one day in the United States—except you'd probably soon be beating us.

Robert Low
London, England

Rob Nixon replies:

One-day cricket was indeed devised in England in the 1960s. But without Kerry Packer's entrepreneurial interventions, the one-day game would never have revolutionized the aesthetics, economics, and international politics of cricket. Although pay has improved since the 1970s, the gap between the salaries that international cricketers receive and the revenues that the game generates remains unacceptable. This gap has fed the recent match-fixing scandal surrounding the disgraced South African team captain Hansie Cronje. Match fixing has become an immense temptation, given that in India alone \$2.75 billion in bets is placed annually on the details and results of international cricket matches. That's equal to half the annual sales in India's thriving information-technology industry.

Bicker, Bicker

Ivehemently object to the impression that George Johnson would leave with your readers in his article "The Jaguar and the Fox" (July *Atlantic*). He would have people believe that Murray Gell-Mann and Richard Feynman behaved like bickering schoolboys most of the time, and that is just not true. Gell-Mann's office was "just down the hall" from Feynman's, but my office was in between, and over a period of six-

teen years I saw very little evidence of the kind of animosity to which Johnson refers.

Helen J. Tuck
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, Calif.

George Johnson replies:

Helen Tuck's observations are very much at odds with the impressions I gained from interviewing many of the two physicists' colleagues for *Strange Beauty*, my biography of Gell-Mann. In an interview in 1994, for example, the late Fred Zachariasen, who worked with Feynman and Gell-Mann for years at Caltech, described the tension in their relationship to me as "terrible": "Murray hated Dick, and Dick, I think, sort of ignored Murray—which of course annoyed Murray a lot. . . . There was a conflict always between them because Murray never liked to accept this idea that Dick was fundamentally smarter, but he knew it in his heart, I'm sure."

Advice & Consent

Regarding William Langewiesche's "The Shipbreakers" (August *Atlantic*): The solution to the growing glut of obsolete ships is not to encourage an almost pre-industrial craft but to develop a modern ship-scraping process that can competitively recycle a ship in a clean and safe manner.

Shipbreaking, with its reliance on raw human labor, is inherently inefficient. South Asian shipbreakers currently handle 500 to 700 mostly small vessels a year. Although that figure represents more than 90 percent of the world's scrapping activity, it does not represent the world market. Approximately 75,000 maritime vessels will have to be scrapped over the next thirty years. That means roughly 2,500 ships a year. The South Asian breakers have resisted looking at a process improvement because they are entrepreneurs, not industrialists. This is not to say that India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are incapable of changing, but change will have to come from an infusion of domestic or international capital and government incentives for industrial enterprise growth. Although none of the South Asian governments in question has deemed the ship-breaking sector important enough for this kind of attention, the Japanese government has. In the late 1990s Japan's Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund committed \$66 million in official credit to India's port of Pipavav to construct two docks and berths

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for the scrapping of Japan's tankers. The endeavor, which plans to use water-jet technology for cutting, has been resisted by the rest of India's shipbreaking sector.

Although on a smaller scale, the model for Pipavav is the last efficient ship-disposal process conducted by the East Asian cartels in the 1980s. At its peak, in 1985, Taiwan, the People's Republic of China, and South Korea were scrapping nearly 70 percent of the world's tonnage, which amounted to 2,360 vessels worldwide. Although South Asia's market share amounted to 90 percent in 1996, only 711 vessels were scrapped worldwide that year.

Though many in the industry hoped that the U.S. Navy Ship Disposal Project would lead to an advanced ship-scrapping process, that was not its mission. The Navy was to ensure that scrappers met U.S. environmental and occupational-safety regulations. Faced with a moribund domestic industry, the Navy decided to outsource rather than to subsidize a sector, to become competitive in the world market. Consequently, the Navy's solicitation did not require bidders to address macro-process or market issues. The Navy also did not provide incentives for capital investment in innovative technology or to achieve economies of scale. Although most of the awardees used some innovative approaches anyway, the Navy has been unable to guarantee a steady stream of ships, which has made it difficult to quantify savings of time or cost thus far. This is in part because the Navy retains ownership of scrap proceeds and remits that "profit" to the U.S. Treasury, not to reinvestment in the ship-disposal project. To turn this state of affairs around will take congressional action.

Two issues must be resolved to achieve safe, clean ship disposal over the next thirty years. First, an advanced industrial process must be developed—one that meets environmental and safety standards and is geared to the limited space in modern ports for scrapping operations. Second, to guarantee capitalization costs, investors will undoubtedly require subsidies or levies from states or the shipping industry to compensate for the effect that vacillating scrap prices have on enterprise stability. Industry circles are already discussing the latter issues. The process development will undoubtedly be resolved in the near future, because it is a technical problem, not a philosophical conundrum.

Polly Parks
Washington, D.C.

Peter Schrag ("High Stakes Are for Tomatoes," August *Atlantic*) shouldn't be permitted to have it both ways, objecting to standardized testing and then objecting to the "embarrassingly low benchmarks" on which "the 'Texas miracle' and other celebrated successes are based."

The Texas standards are about to be increased for 2004–2005 under current law—the fifth or sixth time since the 1970s that Texas testing standards have been revised upward. Other states, such as Illinois and Colorado, are mulling over using the ACT as the de facto high school exit exam, which raises this question: Why not just use the SAT or the ACT exam as the de facto test and use the suggested Delaware approach of different diplomas to reflect particular score and other achievement ranges? Let's forget egalitarianism and just make it more like the track system of Europe and Asia.

Actually, the Texas standards make sense. The local public water supply is certified by regulators as meeting minimal public-health standards, but you are not guaranteed Evian when you turn on the tap. Likewise, public schools should be turning out kids who can at least meet a minimum literacy and numeracy standard, but should not be expected to make every kid a Nobel Prize winner.

Thom Prentice
Austin, Texas

There is something peculiar about the tone and content of James Fallows's article "An Acquired Taste" (July *Atlantic*). As a former debater, I offer the following observations: (1) The purpose of debating an opponent is to win. (2) Tactics that unsettle the opponent are perfectly valid. (3) Turning the opponent's mistakes to one's advantage is par for the course. (4) Selecting data and sources that validate one's views (while ignoring facts and quotations that don't help) is also standard operating procedure. A debate is not a linear, unemotional, and balanced exploration of facts. It is a competition, in which the debater's skills in language, strategy, and tactics (attack, response, and counterattack) are tested through adversarial exchange. I don't know that winning a debate correlates with being an effective politician, but surely the point of holding a public debate between politicians is to see who wins. Fallows seems distressed that Gore plans and uses effective strategy and tactics and then wins his debates. Isn't that the point?

Sheila Quinn
Mountlake Terrace, Wash.

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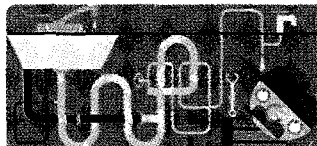
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THE NOVEMBER ALMANAC



Health & Safety

November ushers in the peak season for meningococcal meningitis—inflammation of the lining of the spinal cord and brain that spreads through the exchange of saliva and mucus, and can result in brain damage, coma, and death. A vaccine against the illness has been given to military recruits for 30 years; this year one will also be offered to college freshmen—a group that, like military recruits, typically lives together in close quarters. College students account for about 100 of the country's 3,000 or so meningococcal-meningitis cases each year, a figure that has increased by 50 percent since 1991. Most college cases involve freshmen; presumably upperclassmen develop immunity. The increase led the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to recommend that the vaccine be offered to freshmen this fall. It will be available through the clinics of nearly 500 colleges and universities.



Demographics

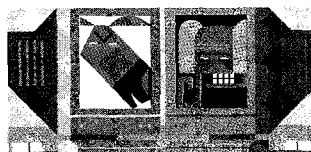
The nation's plumbers will be out in force on November 24, the day after Thanksgiving: the Friday after the holiday is typically one of their busiest days of the year and begins a holiday-related spike in plumbing emergencies. Most of the problems stem from food waste that ends up in kitchen pipes during meal preparation and cleanup. The traditional Thanksgiving feast might as well have been designed to cause plumbing distress: along with turkey bones and congealed grease, potato peels pose particular difficulties for household pipes (the peels swell when wet), and strands from celery (often an ingredient of stuffing) may wind around and jam the blades of in-sink garbage disposals.

Environment

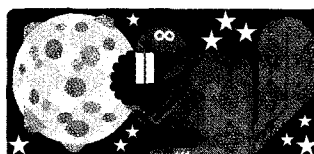
November 1: An indefinite ban on longline fishing in the Gulf of Mexico's DeSoto Canyon—a 43,540-square-mile swordfish nursery ground—begins today, by order of the National Marine Fisheries Service. It will be followed in February by bans in areas off the coasts of South Carolina and eastern Florida. Longline fishing, which uses lines that stretch for dozens of miles and have hundreds of hooks, indiscriminately snares both marketable fish and "bycatch"—generally, fish that must be discarded at sea because they are too small to be sold legally. It is the predominant commercial means of catching swordfish. A particular problem has been the destruction of swordfish that are too young to breed. The Fisheries Service expects the bans to reduce by a third or more juvenile swordfish discards by U.S. fishermen. Commercial fishing organizations argue that the bans will take an unfair toll on area fishermen. They also point out that most of the swordfish harvested in the Atlantic are caught in international waters by foreign vessels, and maintain that reductions in international quotas, adopted last year, should be given more time.

Government

November 7: Election Day. For the first time ever in a presidential contest, some of the voting will be conducted on the Internet: in a pilot project some 250 members of the military overseas will cast their ballots online. Proponents of Internet voting argue that it



could help solve the much decried problem of low voter turnout; they point to Arizona, which allowed online voting in last March's Democratic primary and experienced an almost sixfold increase in participation over the 1996 level. They also point out that under the current system absentee ballots do not always reach the United States in time. Critics maintain that online voting discriminates against minority voters, who are less likely than whites to have easy access to the Internet. They also cite fears that hackers could type their way to the President of their choice.

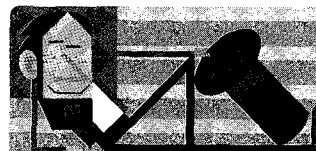


The Skies

November 11: Full Moon, also known this month as the Beaver Moon and the Moon of the Falling Leaves. 12: Tonight the gibbous Moon passes just above the bright red star Aldebaran and just below Saturn and then Jupiter, with the Pleiades star cluster above them all. 19: Tonight Saturn is at its brightest in more than 25 years. 29: Venus lies just below the crescent Moon at dusk.

Arts & Letters

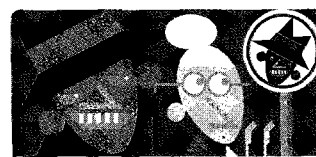
November 15: A permanent exhibit titled "The American Presidency"—the first comprehensive view of that office—opens today at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, in Washington, D.C. The exhibit will contain more than 900 objects, including the desk on which Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, the top hat worn by Abraham Lincoln on the night of his assassination, a pair of pajamas belonging to Warren Harding, and a set of Dwight D. Eisenhower's golf clubs. Also today the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, in New York

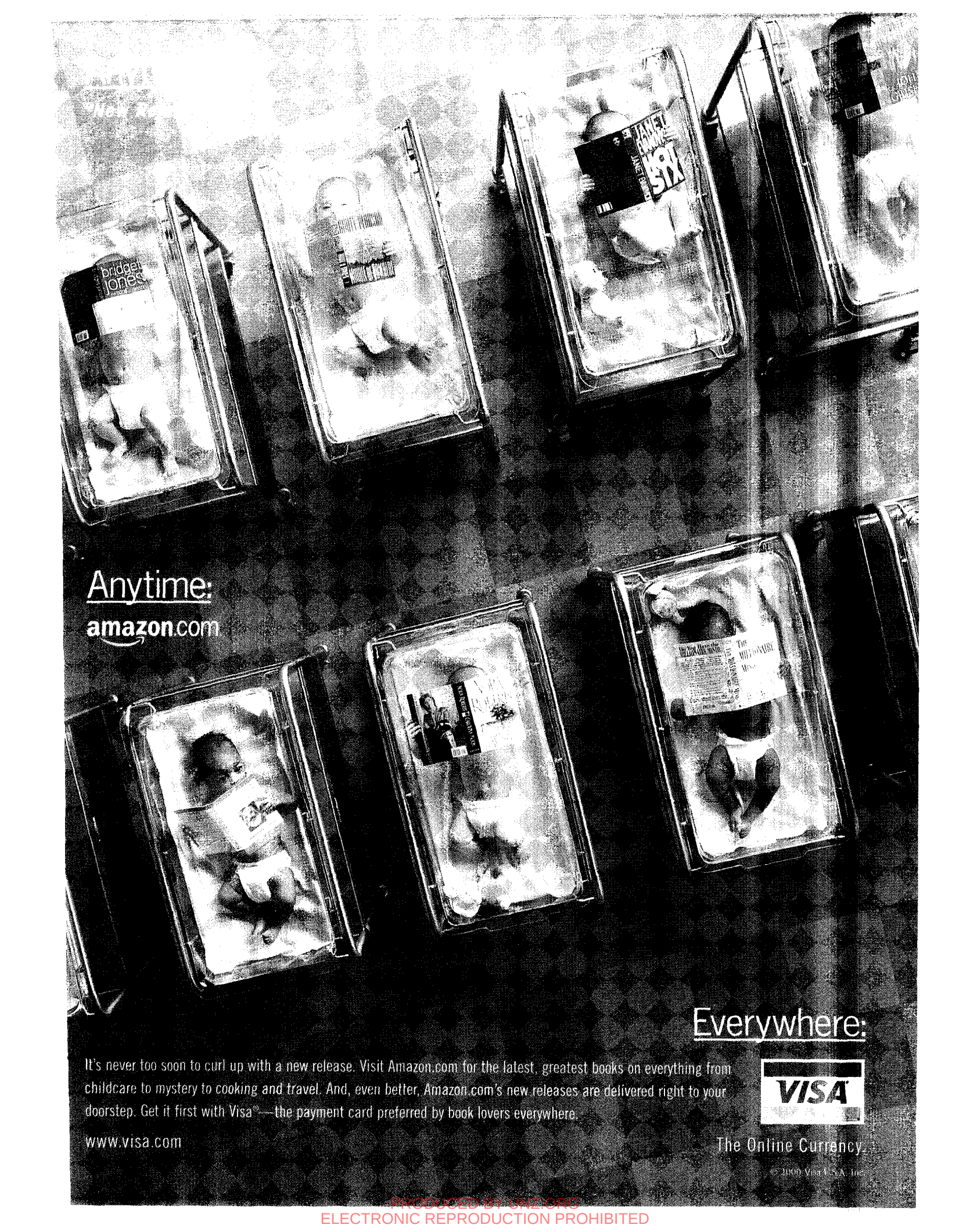


City, announces the winners of the first annual National Design Awards, for product design, communications (including graphic and multimedia design), and environmental design (including architecture and landscape and interior design). In September the museum gave two special awards: to the architect Frank Gehry, for lifetime achievement, and to Apple Computers, for corporate achievement.

75 Years Ago

E. M. Forster, writing in the November, 1925, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "There is a word that is sometimes hung up at the edge of a tram line: the word 'Stop.' Written on a metal label by the side of the line, it means that a tram will stop here presently. It is an example of pure information.... Compare it with another public notice which is sometimes exhibited in the darker cities of England: 'Beware of pickpockets, male and female.' Here again there is information. A pickpocket may come along presently, just like a tram, and we take our measures accordingly. But there is something else besides.... We have been reminded of several disquieting truths—the general insecurity of life, human frailty, the violence of the poor, and the fatuous trustfulness of the rich, who always expect to be popular without having done anything to deserve it.... By taking the form of a warning it has made us afraid.... Besides conveying information it has created an atmosphere, and to that extent it is literature."





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Hybrid Vigor

*A funny thing happened on the way to the demise
of the plug-in car*

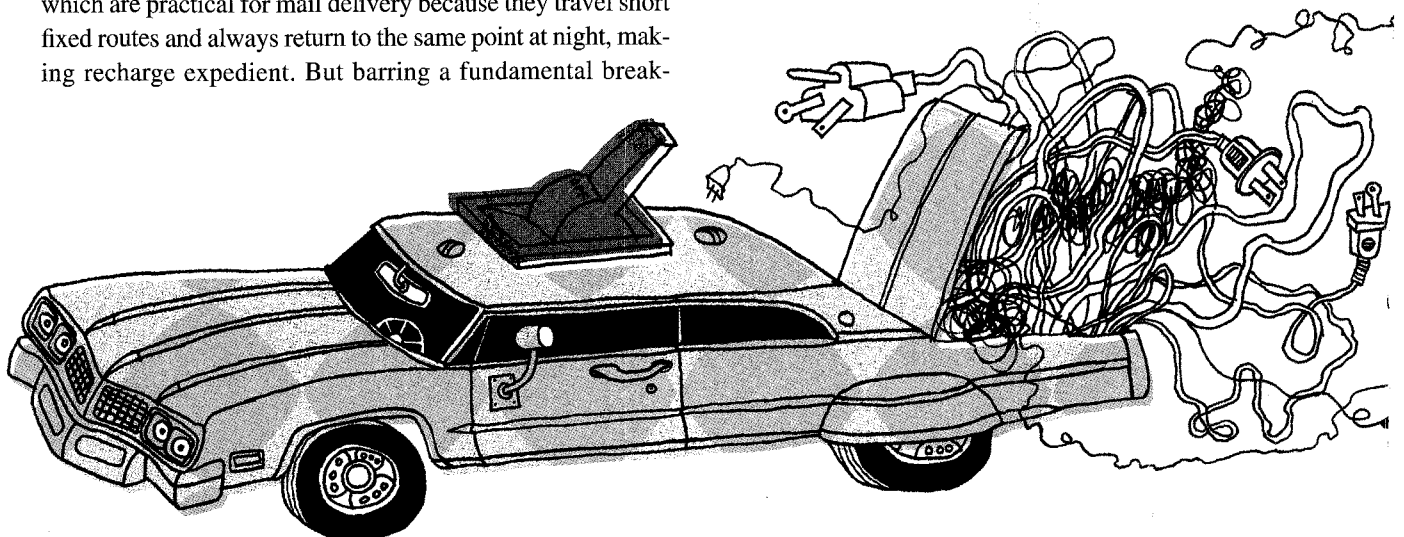
NOT long ago electric cars were going to save the world. Every major automaker was developing a battery-driven vehicle that would offer both freedom from petroleum and zero emissions (at least at the tailpipe—the power plant might be another matter). California enacted a regulation requiring the test marketing of electric cars; General Motors got there first, in 1996, with the EV1, a *Jetsons*-style plug-in coupe that was just the ticket for guilt-free commuting. And it was . . . terrible.

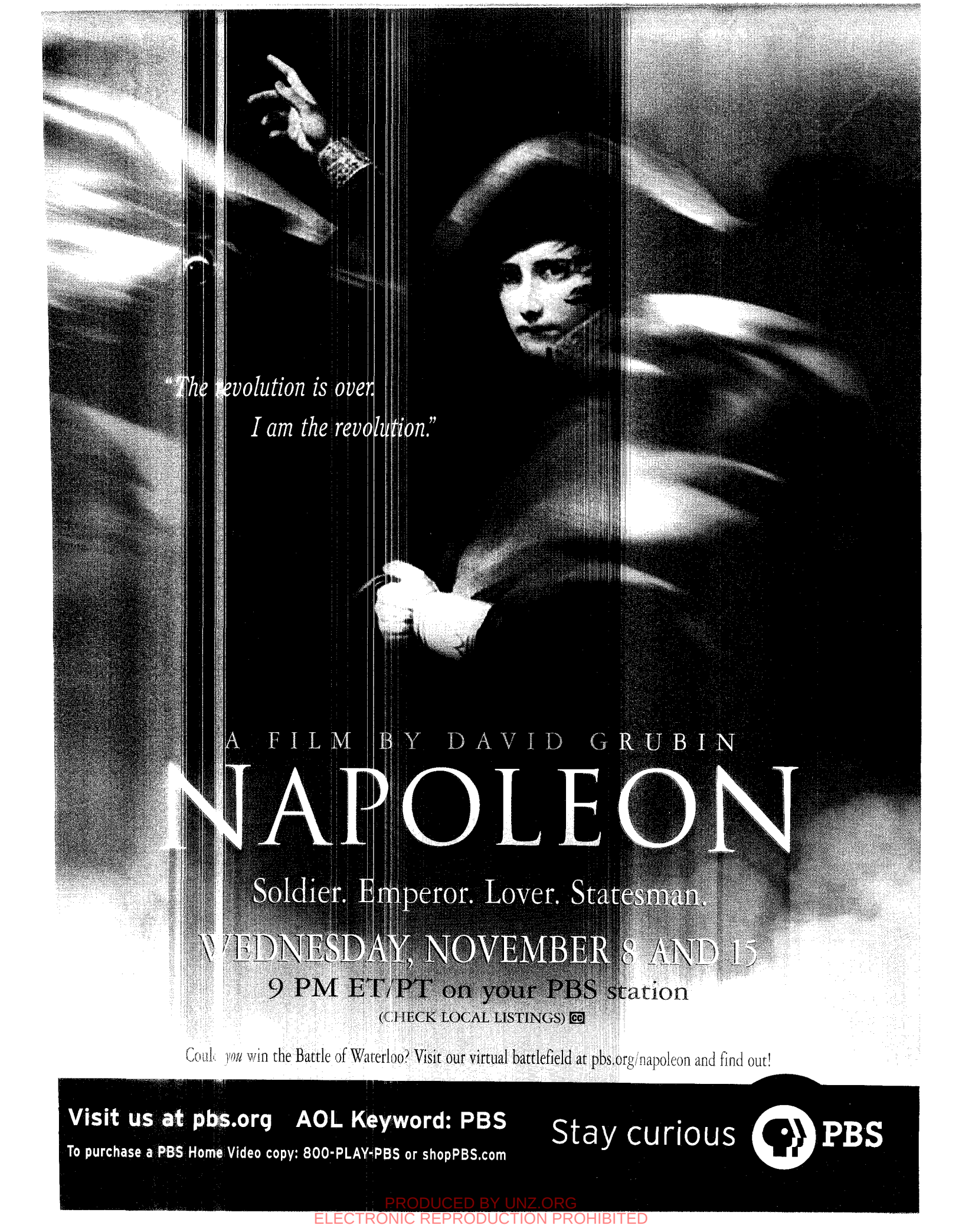
Despite hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of research and development, GM's electric car could travel only fifty to eighty miles before it needed a recharge, which took four to eight hours. A drive outside Los Angeles, or even to the outer valley, would have had to include a leisurely dinner followed by a three-part German opera to pass the time while the batteries recharged for the return trip. And that was assuming an excursion without air-conditioning: with the AC on, the range of the EV1 shrank further, and tractor-trailer rigs could pass it going up hills. Once word got out about this impracticality, even trend-happy Californians shunned the electric car. GM recently "suspended" production of the EV1. Honda, long the industry leader in environmental improvements, abandoned its electric-car project; other manufacturers scaled back their efforts. A few fleet buyers may still go electric—the U.S. Postal Service, for example, which has begun buying battery-powered vans, which are practical for mail delivery because they travel short fixed routes and always return to the same point at night, making recharge expedient. But barring a fundamental break-

through in battery chemistry, electric transportation for the masses appears as dead as a car whose headlights have been left on all night.

Yet a funny thing happened on the way to the demise of the plug-in car. Engineers realized that they could use what they'd learned about batteries and electric-coil motors to fashion half-piston, half-electric "hybrid" cars that dramatically reduce energy consumption but run in the conventional way—on petroleum from filling stations—and never need to be plugged in. Driving range, the big drawback of electric designs, not only isn't a problem with hybrid vehicles but is significantly improved: hybrids get so many miles to a tank of gas that one could drive from New York to Washington and back without stopping. This is practical and attractive in an era of rising fuel prices. The market is about to be flooded with hybrid vehicles—and they offer an example of the kind of serendipity that occurs when in the course of failing to achieve a planned goal, one discovers something of greater value.

Hummmmmmm goes the Honda Insight, the first hybrid car to hit the U.S. market, when the key is turned in the ignition. A piston engine has started up, but it's so small—just three cylinders, making 67 horsepower—that it's hard to hear. An electric engine sits in tandem with the internal-combustion unit, but it is almost inaudible. So quiet is the Insight that a





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check of the instrument panel is required to make sure the car is really on.

When a hybrid vehicle accelerates, the two engines run together, providing maximum horsepower; they also run simultaneously when the driver stomps on the throttle for a high-speed pass. But if the vehicle is cruising and power demand is low, only the piston engine operates. When the driver hits the brakes, the technological fun begins: the electric motor runs in reverse, exploiting the friction of braking to generate a current that recharges a bank of batteries. The point of this arrangement is to create a vehicle that has the same basic properties as today's conventional cars but requires only a small-displacement piston engine, which burns far less gasoline. Normally, 67 horsepower would not be enough for a modern car; assisted by an electric motor, it is.

The Insight is rated by the Environmental Protection Agency at a phenomenal 61 miles per gallon in city driving and 70 mpg on the highway. Its tank holds 10.6 gallons, meaning the car can travel about 700 miles between fill-ups. For the typical driver that's one stop a month at the gas station. And the electric assist gives the car pizzazz. Humming around in an Insight, I found myself consistently able to outrun big, powerful cars. I also found that the Insight would accelerate uphill with the air-conditioning on. In a week of local driving the car got 58 miles per gallon. I know this because the Insight's instrument panel flashes a continuous readout of gas mileage.

From an engineering standpoint, what hybrid propulsion does is combine the best aspects of electric and piston motivation while avoiding their weaknesses. The weakness of batteries is "energy density." An automobile gas tank that weighs about a hundred pounds when it is full contains enough usable energy to move the typical car 200 to 300 miles; a thousand pounds or more of chemical batteries would be needed to provide that kind of range, and there is no battery-design breakthrough on the horizon that could reduce that weight. ("Flywheel" batteries, which store power as circular motion, could in theory have roughly the same energy density as a gas tank, but making a flywheel battery practical for propulsion has stumped every engineer who has looked at the problem.) If an

electric car were designed to have the driving range of a gasoline-powered car, the entire vehicle would be given over to batteries. The car would then exist to transport its own energy supply, which isn't a huge accomplishment.

The weakness of internal combustion is low thermal efficiency. Only about a quarter of the BTU value in a tank of gasoline is translated into forward motion. The rest is wasted—lost during braking and as heat radiating from the engine. (Piston engines must be cooled or they will crack; but thermodynamically speaking, a car's radiator is a waste pump whose purpose is to discard energy.) Next time you fork over \$2.00 for a gallon of gasoline, bear in mind that your car's internal-combustion engine will merrily waste \$1.50 of it.

The hybrid car avoids the electric energy-density problem by having a relatively small array of batteries that provides only supplemental power. It addresses the wastefulness of the piston engine by recapturing the energy that would otherwise be lost during braking. Essentially, the electric coil serves as an energy recycler for the piston part. Because less energy is lost from the gasoline, less gasoline needs to be burned. Hybrid cars won't put the oil companies out of business, but they do promise to effect a significant reduction in petroleum use, coupled with a drop in greenhouse-gas emissions—important social gains without any compromises in the way people like to drive.

■ ■ ■

The Honda Insight will not be the car that brings hybrid power to the masses. With two seats and a storage shelf, it is petite, to say the least—it looks small enough to fit inside a standard minivan and come bursting out the way hidden supercars do at key moments in James Bond movies. Hoping for a spectacular mpg figure, Honda made the Insight extra small and held its weight to a mere 2,000 pounds (the typical midsize sedan weighs about 3,500 pounds) by using an aluminum body, which is too expensive for any reasonably priced car on which the manufacturer expects to make a profit; Honda is selling the Insight at a loss. The energy analyst Amory Lovins has been saying for years that if cars were designed like aircraft, using "minimum-weight criteria," they could get much better mileage and still accelerate like the

dickens (see "Reinventing the Wheels," January, 1995, *Atlantic*). The Insight is proof that Lovins is right, but also that this approach is unaffordable.

Perfecting engineering details in the Insight, however, will result in large, practical cars that, though they won't achieve 70 mpg, will represent a substantial improvement over today's vehicles. As you read this, Toyota is bringing to the U.S. market a compact four-door hybrid sedan called the Prius, which is already selling well in Japan. The Prius has a conventional steel body weighing 2,800 pounds, yet it achieves about 50 mpg in real-world driving conditions. This figure is roughly twice the current average for new U.S. vehicles, and suggests that a full-size hybrid car could achieve 40 mpg. Further, Ford is preparing to market a hybrid sport utility vehicle, GM has hybrid pickup trucks in preparation, and Dodge is gearing up to offer its gargantuan Durango SUV with hybrid power. The world will not beat a path to a teeny two-seat hybrid. But a full-size car that gets 40 miles per gallon? A minivan or an SUV that gets 30 miles per gallon? These could be huge hits in the marketplace, reversing the trends in petroleum consumption and greenhouse-gas emissions. In the end hybrid power may prove a better idea than the electric car, because it will appeal to everyone.

That failed electric-car projects have led to the invention of highly desirable hybrid propulsion serves as another reminder that what you find may be better than what you sought.

When Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, he was trying to perfect an antiseptic formula based on nasal mucus. No one cares that his original goal was never met—and some may be relieved. Walter Alvarez was attempting to figure out the geologic origin of Italy's Apennine Mountains when he came across the evidence that dinosaurs had been rendered extinct by a large comet or asteroid; his intended study objective was quickly cast aside. Teflon was found by chemists who were trying to invent an alternative form of Freon; rayon and nylon were first fashioned by mistake; many cancer drugs have been discovered through serendipity.

Gresham's Law holds that bad ideas drive out the good. Sometimes a bad idea points the way to a good one. ☼

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The Crescent and the Tricolor

France today has more Muslims than practicing Catholics, and couscous has arguably become the country's national food

WHEN, two days before Bastille Day in 1998, the French national soccer team upset Brazil 3-0 to win the World Cup, a million people staged an impromptu parade on the Champs-Élysées. Within days it had become a cliché to call it the most important demonstration since the liberation of Paris from the Germans, in 1944. It was a cele-

by Christopher Caldwell

bration less of French sports than of French society—and of immigration's role in that society. As people poured into the streets from all corners of the capital and the country, it became clear what a multiracial society France had become. About 13 percent of the population is immigrant, but the percentage in Paris is much higher. Tens of thousands of blacks and tens of thousands

of Asians and hundreds of thousands of Arabs were in the streets along with native-born whites, who call themselves *français de souche* ("root French"). They were celebrating a team that included players born in Ghana and Guadeloupe. And they were celebrating especially the brilliant midfielder Zinedine Zidane, born in Marseille of Algerian parents, who had scored two goals in France's triumph.

Zidane had been suspended three weeks earlier for one of the dirtiest fouls in World Cup memory. But now he was living proof that France was great because France was welcoming. In the coming months a leading French novelist would write *Zidane: The Novel of a Victory*, and President Jacques Chirac would award Zidane and his teammates the Légion d'honneur. As a Frenchman boasted afterward, "Germany's full of Turks—and there's not a single Turk on the German football team." People marked a changing attitude toward immigrants in general and Arabs in particular, and named it the Zidane effect. It resembled the way

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certain backers of a Colin Powell run for the presidency in 1996 came to feel about race—suddenly viewing as solved something they'd previously thought of as a remedy-defying problem, and feeling good about themselves as a result.

Not since fifteenth-century Spain has any Western European country had so substantial a Muslim presence. And for years immigration from the Islamic countries has looked destabilizing, as tension has increased between the children of Arab immigrants (*beurs* and *beurettes*, as they're called) and alarmed whites who question their assimilability. In 1990 the

*Islam's influence will
be even greater in
the next generation.
Immigrants from
Islamic countries have
been three times as
fertile as the French.*

Lyon suburb of Vaulx-en-Velin saw days of looting and burning. Although unorganized, it was understood less as a rampage than as a protest against the *beurs'* marginalization. Last year violence erupted in France's small towns—most spectacularly Vauvert, a village between Montpellier and Nîmes, where “*bandes des jeunes*” (French journalistic code for nonwhite youths) trashed the center for several days. Strasbourg has seen a New Year's Eve tradition develop that resembles Halloween Devil's Night in Detroit. Bonfires are lit, buildings are vandalized, and last New Year's Eve dozens of cars were set on fire. Other small cities suffer sporadic sprees of vandalism, which their perpetrators call “*rodeos*”—Nancy, for instance, and Rennes, which is now patrolled by *gardiens de nuit*, a sort of French version of New York's Guardian Angels. At times France's racial problem appears to resemble the situation in America in the 1960s.

But the comparison can be misleading. Generally speaking, it's a smaller problem than the American race problem. *Beurs*

are less visibly different, discrimination against them tends to be on the basis of class rather than race, and when they assimilate into society (or make a pile of money), they're French, period. But in one respect it's a more serious problem, because differences of religion are involved. Islam envisions an Islamic state to protect its rights. France, meanwhile, has one of the most stringent legal separations of Church and State in the world. This creates constant conflict between a state based on the Rights of Man and a religion that, strictly interpreted, holds that all legitimate political power flows from the Koran.

The excellent halal (the Islamic equivalent of kosher) butchers who have brought first-rate meat to the poorest neighborhoods have been an outright windfall for French culture. Other imports—such as the female-circumcision rites practiced by certain African Muslim immigrants—are so repugnant to French sensibilities that they have been outlawed. Still others are allowed but tie the country in knots. Since the late 1980s the question of whether Muslim girls should be allowed to wear their traditional scarves to school has come up year after year, in a way that might seem irrational unless one considers the role of French schools as “mills of citizenship”—and not just of citizenship but of Frenchness. The Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, first made his reputation as Education Secretary with anguished soul-searching on the headscarf question.

But the latest wave of immigration threatens to change what Frenchness means. Islam has left Protestantism and Judaism far behind and is now the second religion of France. No official national statistics are kept on religion and race in France (the country, with its long tradition of equality of citizens before the state, holds such distinctions—officially, at least—to be meaningless), but the best estimates of the country's Interior Ministry put France's Muslim population at four million, two million of them French citizens. The historian Alain Besançon has estimated that given the meager rates of churchgoing in France (below five percent), the country now has more Muslims than practicing Catholics. In 1994 *Le Monde* found that 27 percent of Muslims were believing and practicing—which means that Islam may someday be the country's predominant religion if one measures by the number of people who practice it.

But Islam's weight in France is even

greater than that, particularly for the generation to come. For one thing, immigrants and their descendants are concentrated in a few important cities and regions (Paris, Marseille, Rhône-Alpes, Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing). For another, although France's non-Muslim population has replaced itself at roughly the Western European rate of 1.3 births per woman, immigrants from Islamic countries have been three to four times as fertile for quite some time. The birth rate among Algerian women was 4.4 in 1981 and 3.5 in 1990. That among Moroccans was 5.8 and 3.5 in those years, and among Tunisians 5.1 and 4.2. These numbers do show natality declining toward the national average, but only slowly. Meanwhile, the disparity in birth rates and the concentration of the Muslim population means that in certain French metropolises a new generation of citizens—those born from the 1970s to the 1990s—is one third Muslim.

IN some places France already looks like a Muslim country. One of these places is La Bricarde, a cluster of semi-public low-income apartment towers built in the early seventies at the far northern edge of Marseille. This is part of the Bricarde-Castellane-Plan d'Aou complex, where 8,300 of the poorest people in France live, and where Zinedine Zidane grew up. A quarter of Marseille's population of 800,000 is Muslim, and La Bricarde is a mixture of North African exoticism and Continental decadence. Lotto tickets are the most popular commodity in the rinky-dink variety store that serves the complex. On a fall day recently, in the blistering heat of the central courtyard, a teenage girl in a tight black sweater walked with two pregnant friends past an old lady in a djellaba. Satellite dishes run up the sides of the towers like buttons on a shirt. There are 700 apartments in La Bricarde, and at least 200 dishes, all of them aimed skyward to pick up signals from Africa: France has one of the least developed cable networks in Western Europe, and Algerian television can't be picked up there except by satellite. Rock bluffs reminiscent of Arizona loom behind the towers. On several hot summer nights in recent years the residents of La Bricarde have staged their own spectacular variant on Strasbourg's rodeo, stealing cars from the city below, setting them on fire, and launching them from the bluffs.

Continued on page 30

NOVEMBER 2003

arts ENTERTAINMENT

PREVIEW



MUSICAL

Two Divas
Sing the *Sins*

THEATRE

Graeme
Murphy
and Co.

FILM

Edward
Yang's
Taipei Tale

POPULAR

MUSIC

Broadside
in a box

1977

The Swing
& Snap of
Bill Charlap

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CLASSICAL MUSIC & DANCE

BY AUSTIN BAER AND NANCY DALVA

SINFUL SOPRANOS

Brecht and Weill wrote bigger and more-popular works for the stage than *The Seven Deadly Sins*, but artistically this one's the bull's-eye. At the start Anna I/II, from a Louisiana of the poet's fantasies, sallies forth to the nightclub circuit. Some forty minutes later she has lived through seven years in seven cities and scraped together the cost of a new house for her selfish family. At the final curtain she is heading home, spent in body and soul, her own dreams reduced to ashes. Anna's personality was originally split between two performers: the practical, goal-oriented Anna I, who cracks the whip and narrates, and Anna II, the artist, who dances and ineffectually rebels. At the premiere, in Paris, the part

Audra McDonald



of Anna I fell to Lotte Lenya, Weill's wife, who—both in the tinselly soprano of her youth and the gravel baritone of her later years—realized Weill's intentions with complete authority, even though she could not, in any conventional sense, actually sing. Although stagings remain infrequent, one generation after another of theatrically minded successors have "rediscovered" the score's pungent, cabaret verve, quite a few even singing in the soprano range that Weill had in mind. This month two reigning divas take their interpretations to the concert hall: Germany's Ute Lemper, icy and acid, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (November 9–14; 312-294-3000); and Broadway's generous, impulsive Audra McDonald, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic (November 30–December 3; 323-850-2000). Weill fans, it's time to pack your bags.

—A.B.

DANCES FROM DOWN UNDER

The Sydney Dance Company, the highly acclaimed troupe from Down Under, is celebrating the choreographer Graeme Murphy's twenty-fifth year as its artistic director by barnstorming America with two of his evening-length works. Murphy, who was named a living national treasure in Australia in 1997, has created dances for the repertoires of the Australian Ballet, the Canadian Opera Company, the Netherlands Dance Theater, the Royal New Zealand Ballet, and the on-ice duo Torvill and Dean. For his own company he has choreographed more than forty dances. Stopping in New Orleans (November 2, 4); St. Louis (November 10, 11); Amherst, Massachusetts (November 14); and Stonybrook, New York (November 17), on their way to a week-long engagement at The Joyce Theater, in New York City (November 28–December 3), the Aussies are alternating two very different pieces, though each showcases Murphy's longstanding commitment to collaboration with composers, in both of these cases with the Australian percussionist Michael Askill. Two percussionists are on stage for *Salome*, the more dramatic work, in which Murphy's retelling focuses on all four main characters (Herod, Herodias, John the Baptist, and Salome). The sounds of a Japanese bamboo flute add to the live accompaniment for the more spiritual *Air and other invisible forces*, a mosaic of solo, small-group, and ensemble dancing. Costumes for both productions are the contribution of Akira Isogawa, Australia's fashion designer of the year in 1999, who gives us a look at what's been hot on the other side of the planet.

—N.D.



From *Air and other invisible forces*

BRANCO GAICA

A MOVEABLE FEAST

Summer music retreats are legion, but the Marlboro Music Festival is unique. Yo-Yo Ma was speaking for multitudes when he said, "Marlboro was the place where I decided to become a musician. Living through these summers led me to a commitment to music that I could not have received from one school or one teacher." Every summer for the past half century, exceptional young talents and seasoned masters have been making the pilgrimage to rural Vermont. There, for a blessed spell, they relax their relentless pursuit of individual perfection and devote themselves instead to the rewards of pure musical exploration in the company of like-minded colleagues. Deadlines and hierarchy are unknown, and inspiration flows



This way to Marlboro country in every direction. Concert programs at Marlboro, assembled from material that has ripened to readiness in the performers' own good time, are announced only days in advance. During the regular season the "real" world gets to listen in on the results

via Marlboro Music concerts on the road, and for these the repertoire is published in customary long-lead fashion. Half a dozen events are scheduled this month for Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. (for details call 212-581-5197). The pianists Mitsuko Uchida and Richard Goode, the artistic directors of the festival and stars in their own right, are scheduled to participate. For home listening Sony Classical has issued a commemorative double CD honoring Marlboro's fiftieth anniversary. The music selections include historic performances that exemplify to a tee the spirit of a miraculous place apart.

—A.B.

Austin Baer is a writer based in New York. Nancy Dalva's essays appear in the magazine twice.

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY TOM CURRY

FILM

BY ELLA TAYLOR

THAT'S LIFE

In its clarity, *Yi Yi* is a coming-of-age story. The Jian family of Taipei appears to be unraveling as its members stagger through familiar age-appropriate dilemmas: mid-life regrets and career crises for the adults; first love for the teenage daughter; trouble at school for the eight-year-old boy. Nearly three hours long, *Yi Yi* hardly lacks for event; a murder occurs, and an attempted suicide, and the movie is littered with half-betrays and tainted ethical choices. Periods of false calm are punctuated by outbursts of hysteria until, finally, a provisional peace descends for those still standing. Over all of this the writer and director Edward Yang presides with a coolly compassionate eye and quietly goofy wit. The English title for *Yi Yi* is

One and a Two, a reference to the jazz musician's preparatory count and also to



A rare moment of calm in the Jian household

the riffing rhythms of this intelligently loose-limbed movie. Gorgeously shot against the jagged skyline of Taipei, a city of cell phones and pagers, of overnight wealth and sudden bankruptcies, the film evokes a world that mirrors closely our own urban culture, yet with the residual trappings of Taiwanese domestic tradition. Yang has said that his movie is "simply about life," and he has made it seem so with the most graceful artifice and deceptive simplicity. As one character observes, "We get twice from movies what we get from life." Like the child in the film who keeps photographing the backs of people's heads to show what isn't seen, Yang shows us ordinary people acting, as we all do, with imperfect knowledge.

A TOUGH TENDERNESS

Irritated by the mulatto son born on Staten Island in 1956 to an Irish immigrant mother who is reluctantly falling in love with an Italian-American factory worker, *Two Family House* sounds like a position paper on postwar race relations. So it is, but like all well-told tales, only incidentally. The director, Raymond De Felitta, focuses on one man (based on De Felitta's uncle) prying himself loose from a tight community that, even as it props

him up, holds him back from fulfilling his dreams. Having lost an early opportunity to become a singer, Buddy Visalo (the excellent Michael Rispoli) has run through a host of failed money-making ventures, most recently the purchase of a decre-



Landlord and tenant: Rispoli (right) with Macdonald

crepit house whose lower floor he hopes to convert into a bar. Derided by his wife, Estelle (Katherine Narducci, of *The Sopranos*), who loves him but doesn't believe in him, Buddy befriends Mary (Kelly Macdonald, of *Trainspotting*), the heavily pregnant tenant whom he first evicted and then set up in an empty apartment. De Felitta has a playwright's ear for vernacular speech, a novelist's thirst for cumulative detail, a born filmmaker's flair for setting scenes, and the tough tenderness only an insider can bring to the lives of working people. One lovely, languorous sequence—a long Saturday afternoon in Mary's new apartment—beautifully evokes the ups and downs and roundabouts during which love takes root between two decent but radically unfulfilled people.

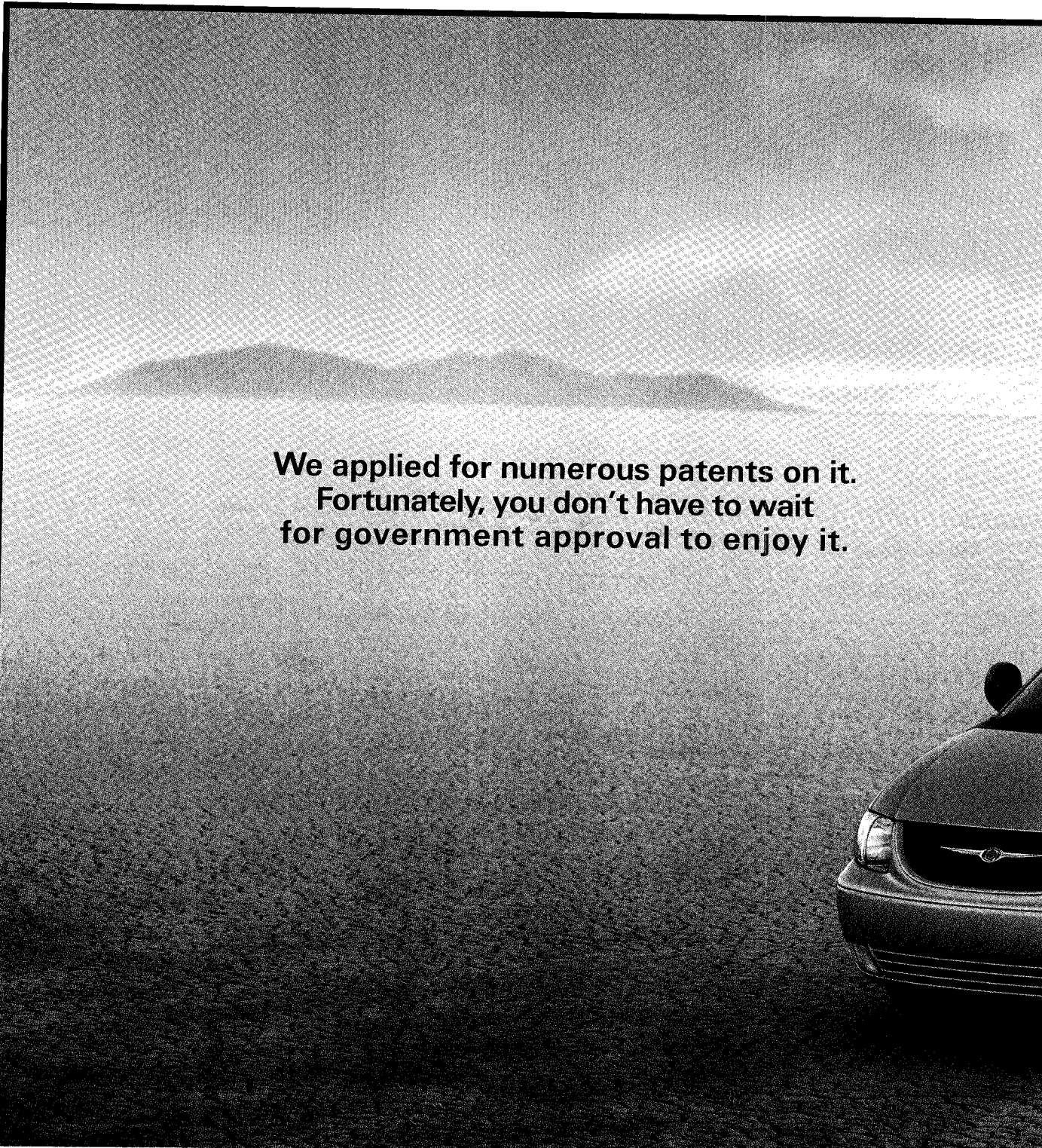
Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

FAMILY TIES

Two siblings, orphaned in childhood and as different from each other as can be, come together for a few weeks in their family home in upstate New York. By the end their relationship has been altered in significant ways that you can barely see but that resonate profoundly. *You Can Count on Me* is a small tale of ordinary trouble told with refreshing delicacy and tact by Kenneth Lonergan, who has made a lucrative living writing the ho-hum screenplays for *Analyze This* and *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*. Laura Linney, whose sterling work in *The Truman Show* laid the groundwork for her performance here as a priss with a wild woman tucked inside her bodice, plays Sammy, a churchgoing bank officer and single mother whose comfortable life is upended when her delinquent younger brother, Terry (played with laconic grace by Mark Ruffalo), stops home to borrow money and stays. As Terry becomes a father of sorts to Sammy's son (Rory Culkin), Sammy finds herself loosening up—specifically in a motel with the new bank manager (amusingly played by Matthew Broderick). If this were prime time, Sammy and Terry's relationship would tie itself in a nice satiny bow of self-actualization. *You Can Count on Me* takes a more inconclusive route, offering its own testament to our incorrigible capacity to repeat our mistakes and then change our ways just a little.

A little male bonding: Mark Ruffalo (left) and Rory Culkin





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POPULAR MUSIC & JAZZ

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

A TRIO WITH BRIO

If Bill Charlap has a greater sensitivity than most young jazz pianists to the melodic and emotional richness of standards, it may be because his father was a songwriter and his mother a band singer. He was clearly also raised to value the lift and momentum of well-turned improvisations created among sympathetic partners, and he has steadily built his reputation as a player worth watching through his tenure with the quintet of the alto saxophonist Phil Woods. Four years ago Charlap began working under his own name with the bassist Peter Washington and the drummer Kenny Washington, unrelated but ideally matched musicians, and the three have developed an affinity that shines in the classic environs of the piano trio. *Written in the Stars* (Blue Note), the group's third disc together and first on a U.S. label, displays what is becoming the Charlap trademark: quality material played with lyrical cogency and rhythmic snap. "Dream" and "Lorelei" are among less-common choices that inspire the trio's focused swing, while more-familiar titles are reinvigorated. Charlap can incorporate premodern influences

without sounding anachronistic, and the Washingtons reflect their extensive time spent separately in the service of Tommy Flanagan, who is to the piano trio what Budapest is to the string quartet. —B.B.



The Bill Charlap Trio

HAVE TAPE RECORDER, WILL TRAVEL

Forty years ago a young high school teacher named Chris Strachwitz began taking a tape recorder into out-of-the-way corners of the South and Southwest in search of local music in communities whose distance from postwar culture helped to preserve indigenous styles. In the following decades the Arhoolie Records label, which Strachwitz launched in order to disseminate his early encounters with such blues poets as Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Big Joe Williams, became the mainstream's entrée to the zydeco of Clifton Chenier, the Cajun sounds of BeauSoleil, and the Tejano music developed along the border of Texas and Mexico by the likes of Flaco Jiménez. Documentary films, extensive reissue efforts, and the creation of a foundation to preserve vernacular music are also part of the Arhoolie legacy, but Strachwitz's personal efforts at what used to be called "field recordings" remain at the label's core. The *Arhoolie Records 40th Anniversary Collection 1960-2000: The Journey of Chris Strachwitz* is a five-CD overview of those sessions. Strachwitz had both the foresight to document lengthy performances where appropriate and a love of jukebox singles that ensured that Arhoolie artists would continue connecting with their public. The writer and co-producer Elijah Wald's excellent annotations help to chart the journey, which ranges from a Mississippi barber shop (where a stropped razor becomes a percussive sword) to encounters at a celebration of "sacred steel" (guitar) gospel music in Florida. —B.B.



ARHOOLIE RECORDS

THE PROTEST POETS

Broadside magazine started as a mimeographed and stapled collection of topical political songs in 1962—just the right year for such a venture, with the repression of the fifties waning, the Civil Rights Movement waxing, the folk revival in full swing, and the anti-war movement soon to come. *The Best of Broadside 1962-1988: Anthems of the American Underground From the Pages of Broadside Magazine* (Smithsonian Folkways), a five-CD box set, documents this era with eighty-nine songs and extensive liner notes expressing opinions that were inexpressible in the mainstream media. Niche marketing for

revolutionary musicians, the magazine and the many songs its founders and contributors recorded and published thrived alongside the protest movement. Though often recorded in crude conditions by today's



Malvina Reynolds

standards, the songs are sung with invigorating vitality, and the subjects remain oddly topical; change a detail here and there, and these exercises in moral outrage could be pulled from today's headlines. Eric Andersen, Bob Dylan, the Fugs, Janis Ian, Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton,

Buffy Sainte-Marie, Pete Seeger, Nina Simone—they're all angry about war, racism, and poverty, and they all hold the rich and powerful responsible. Some topics generate solid laughs, however. Malvina Reynolds actually had a hit in the early sixties with "Little Boxes," a deadpan dissection of housing developments and the mid-

dle-class conformists therein. The times, as Bob Dylan should have said, they aren't a-changin' much. —C.M.Y.

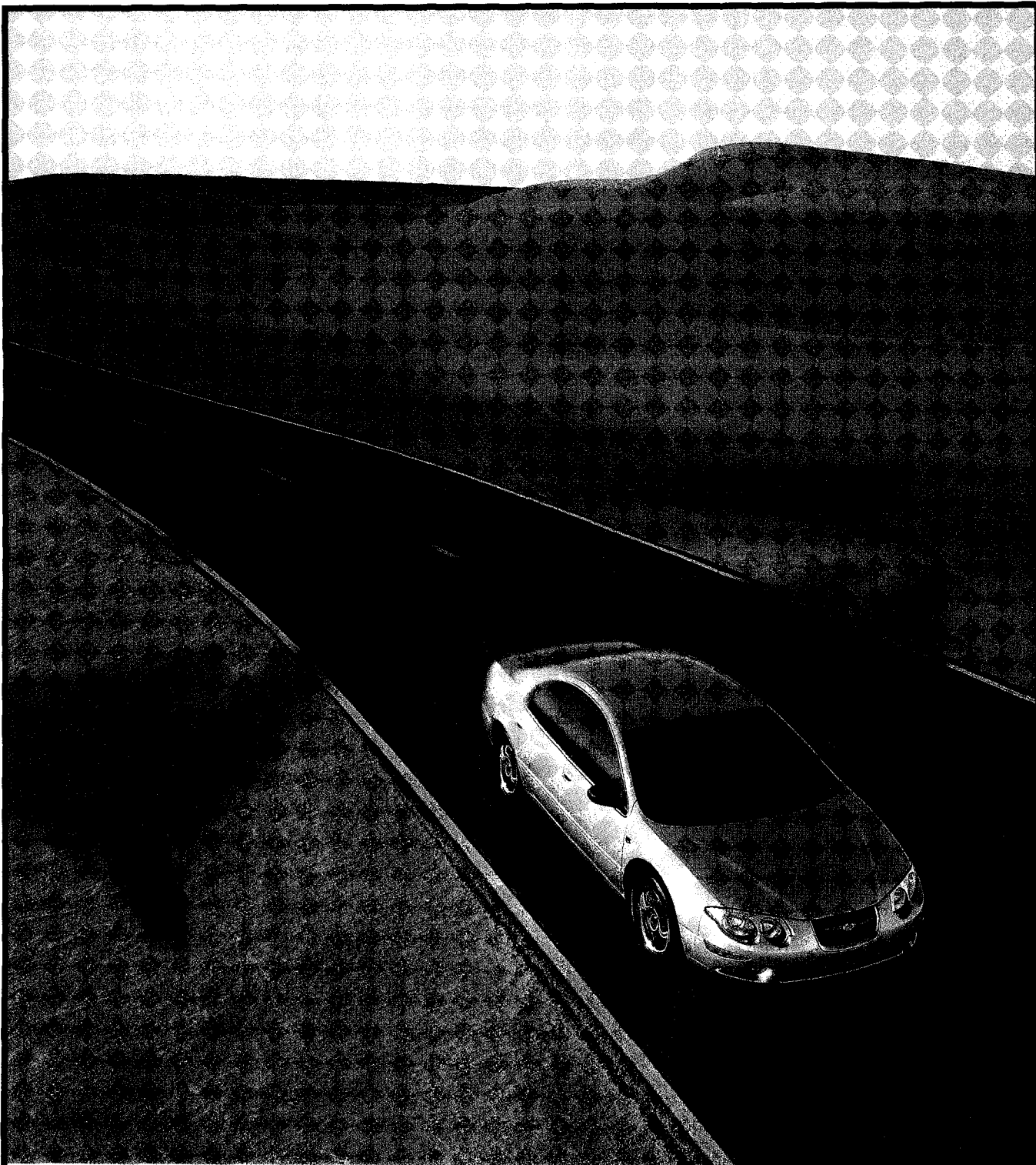
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Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe. Charles M. Young reviews music for Playboy and other publications and for Allmusic.com.



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Continued from page 22

"The future of the city is in north Marseille," says Didier Bonnet, the long-haired and dashing director of the Régie Services Nord Littoral, a social-service organization founded in 1988 to serve the housing projects at Marseille's northern edge. Bonnet also has clients in the center city, but La Bricarde is the focus of almost all of his work, and it worries him. "Unemployment is twenty percent in Marseille," he says, "and fifty percent in certain neighborhoods. This is one of those certain neighborhoods." A quarter mile from La Bricarde is a five-year-old shopping center that is one of the largest in Europe. It was built with government help, on the condition that the store owners hire half their employees from the projects nearby. But the residents have begun to drift back into unemployment. Still, some business gets done. Nordine Taguelmint, who lives in La Bricarde and works for Bonnet, shouted "*Journaliste!*" to reassure a cluster of four alarmed-looking North Africans whom we interrupted in the middle of what looked like a dope deal as we came down a hill behind the projects. A hundred yards farther on Taguelmint pointed out a brand-new Porsche 911 Carrera, owned by a resident of the project.

Juliette Minces, a sociologist who studies Muslim women, reports that a progressive "ethnicization" of these housing blocks is under way. They have become associated with particular ethnic groups—Senegalese here, Algerians there—much the way that American public housing became associated with blacks and Hispanics in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. The residents of Marseille's projects are mostly Muslim, and a majority of them come from the Maghreb region of North Africa. Taguelmint estimates the population of La Bricarde at 60 percent foreign. Of the remainder, 25 percent are *beurs* and 10 percent are French blacks. Only about twenty white families are left in the projects, and all of them, Taguelmint says, feel trapped and bitter. Asked how many belong to the hard-right National Front, he replied, "All of them." *All of them?* He thought for a minute and revised his opinion: "No fewer than fifteen."

Claude Bertrand, the chief of staff to Marseille's mayor, admits that a succession of Socialist mayors bought a degree of social peace with ethnic sorting. "Not so much as it looked," he told me, but he

grants that it happened. He assumes that such segregation will be undone in the natural course of things, primarily by the influence of television. (Other observers assert that by relying on this most American and global of media to assimilate newcomers, France risks solving its ethnic problems by dissolving its own culture—for natives and newcomers alike.) Bertrand is unworried about the National Front, viewing its supporters as basically the same bloc—the *petits blancs*, the white lumpenproletariat—that voted Communist throughout the Cold War. In this he's right. He thinks the best way to defuse the group is by increasing employment.

As the Marseille sociologist Michel Peraldi points out, though, trying to thwart an anti-immigrant movement by increasing employment is self-contradictory. Immigration to Marseille is actually relatively low right now. Immigrants flock to places that are growing, and today's growth is elsewhere, and in high tech—"le capitalisme cognitif," as Peraldi puts it. Growth like that exists in the region—in Aix-en-Provence, for instance, which in two decades has been transformed from a sleepy tourist village into a bobo metropolis of 135,000 people. But Marseille is a city that the rich flee, so most of its growth is in the outlying areas. This is anomalous. The majority of French cities are rich, orderly, and right-wing; it's the suburbs that are impoverished, overcrowded, and violent. Marseille is the only big city in France that follows the U.S. model: its center is poorer than its periphery. So Marseille functions like New York (a comparison that Bertrand makes proudly)—but New York in the 1970s. Older-generation politicians see poverty, crime, maladjustment, and alienation, and trying to come up with a solution they think "government." The top employer in Marseille is the national government, with 14,000 workers. The No. 2 employer is the municipality, with 12,000.

NASSERA Benmarnia and her husband, Nouredine Hagoug, both French-born of Algerian descent, both in their late thirties, are looking for a solution to the Muslim community's problems that doesn't rely solely on throwing money and low-rent housing at people like them. Their Union of Muslim Families, near Marseille's cathedral, a mile up the Canebière from the docks, focuses on charity, cultural values, and informal co-

operation, rather than on political activism. I visited them recently in a crumbling ground-floor office where screw-in sheet-metal shelves were covered with discarded sweaters and French textbooks bound for Algeria. A sign read DO SOMETHING FOR THE NEEDY—INCH' ALLAH!

Benmarnia and Hagoug are devout; they are bringing their children up to speak and write Arabic as well as French. Benmarnia was educated in a Catholic school, but she told me that she would send her two sons to a French Islamic school if she could. She's not alone. A 1995 Harris poll showed that 76 percent of Muslims in France would prefer to send their children to religious schools under state supervision, an option currently available to Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, but not to Muslims.

Like virtually all believing Muslims in France, Benmarnia and Hagoug are preoccupied with the position of Islam under the country's 1905 law regarding the separation of Church and State. It was passed by a secularist government in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair, when a back-

*Most Muslims in France
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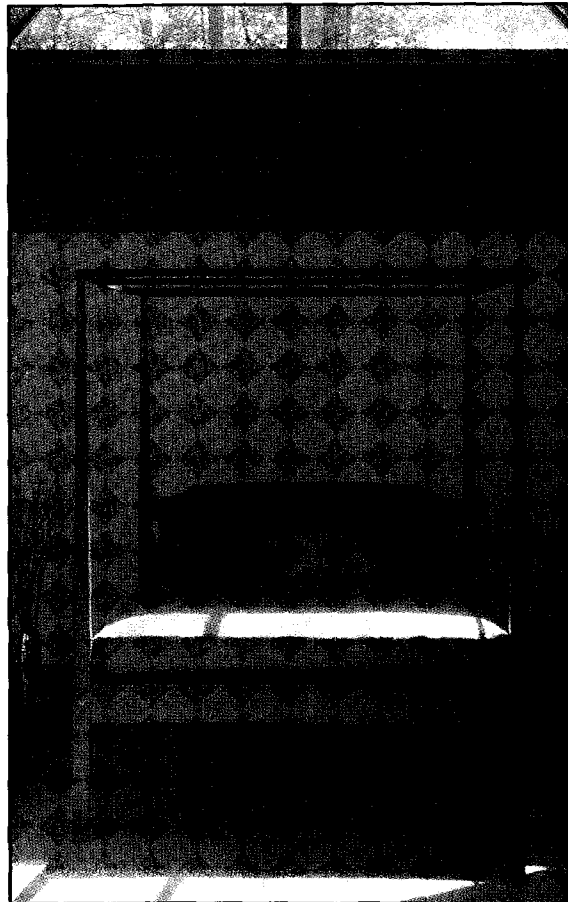
lash set in against the Catholic Church's role in fanning the anti-Semitism that was made evident by the wrongful conviction, for treason, of the Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus. The law banned state funding of religious institutions. For a long time it was so strictly interpreted that it seemed virtually to declare nonbelief as the state religion; for much of the century professing Catholics were informally barred from serving in the French cabinet. The law has generally been praised by the left and reviled by the right—so it is ironic that an immigrant group practicing a

minority religion is now intent on overturning, or at least modifying, a law intended to prevent France from turning into a Catholic theocracy.

At the time the law was passed, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish institutions already had a wealth of buildings and facilities and assets, and they retain them to this day. What's more, a number of those holy buildings were linked to "cultural associations," which the state continues to fund generously. Muslims have no such assets, and their religious traditions make it harder for them to use the political arena to obtain any. Islam doesn't have a hierarchical clergy the way the Catholic Church does. Nor can the Muslims of France, drawn from various countries and religious traditions, form community institutions as easily as, say, the mostly indigenous Jewish population can. The sociologist Franck Frégosi, of CNRS Strasbourg, a national center for scientific research, draws out the comparison rather starkly: France's 45 million Catholics have 40,000 cathedrals, churches, and chapels. Its 900,000 Protestants have 957 houses of worship. Its 500,000 Jews have eighty-two synagogues and large oratories. Its four million Muslims have eight formal mosques (some count 1,600 mosques, but many of these are better described as informal prayer rooms in cellars or spare workrooms). There are Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—but no Muslim—chapels in the French army.

The unequal position of Islam makes it harder for Muslims to integrate in two ways, Hagoug thinks. First, it radicalizes the religion in practice, because freelance "mosques" tend to be set up by poorly trained, fiery, self-appointed imams. Given the interplay between religion and politics in Islam, this in turn radicalizes Muslims' politics. Second, the formal mosques that do exist are funded by foreign Islamic governments often hostile to France's interests. Paris's grand mosque is mainly funded by the government of Algeria, others by Saudi Arabia. This can lead the *français de souche* to suspect—sometimes with justification—that their Muslim fellow citizens constitute a kind of fifth column. And no justification is necessarily needed for their suspicions. "After the Algerian war," Hagoug says, speaking of a humiliating debacle that remains fresh in many minds, "we're a symbol of a French failure."

Benmarnia is intent on making the Mus-



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lim presence in France normal, regular, nonsymbolic. Ultimately, the couple's mission is not so much about separatist claims as about family values. This leads one to wonder if they recognize any commonality with William Bennett and other American conservatives. "We're not the Moral Majority," Hagoug says with a laugh. But when asked if the primary problem is a secularized France with little concern for protecting the interests of families, he nods. "That's it!"

To an American, what's most interesting about Hagoug is his extreme patience in talking about subjects that elicit strident rage in the United States. He loves Marseille, but thinks that a certain amount of racism may be part of its warp and woof. "The identity of the Marseillais," he says, "is often formed by striking out at the last to arrive." He admits that taxi drivers in Marseille are notably xenophobic, but adds that it is possible to negotiate with them; in the mid-1980s their union even petitioned for a loosening of visa requirements for Algerians, worrying that the government's crackdown on immigration was curtailing tourist revenues. In his opposition to a xenophobic politics that would permanently eliminate any room for such negotiations, though, Hagoug is uncompromising. "A National Front victory," he says, "locally or nationally, would be a mortal wound to Marseille."

IT may be in the fascistic National Front that the most surprising shift in attitudes toward Arabs has taken place. During the European elections of 1998 Samuel Maréchal, the party's director of communications (and son-in-law of its founder and leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen), addressed what he called the "multi-denominational" aspect of France. The National Front, he said, would continue to battle against "clandestine" immigration and to back the deportation of new arrivals who were criminals, but it now favored reaching out to Islam. It would continue to oppose the foreign financing of mosques, but would be in favor of changing the law of 1905 in order to ensure French government funding for them. In fact, the National Front is "absolutely" in favor of Muslims' building mosques, so long as they're not "cathedral mosques," with minarets and other symbols on display in ways that might provoke other religions. When the National Front adjutant Bruno Mégret broke with Le Pen over this

and other issues, the movement split in two.

At least that's the way a young Front spokesman named Thomas Lagane explained it to me, from his desk in Le Paquebot, the party's boat-shaped headquarters, which looms over the Seine in Saint-Cloud, just west of Paris. Lagane is a sort of immigrant himself, having been born in the Central African Republic, formerly a French colony, in 1968. With me he went even further than Maréchal has gone publicly, arguing that France's minorities should be flocking to the National Front. "It's wrong to say that France has a single unique culture," he said. "In fact, the National Front is the movement in France that best defends multiculturalism. Let me explain. In your country especially there is a sort of destructive cultural imperialism, a global standardization of behavior, consumption, habits of thought, economic philosophy, that is causing European peoples to lose their identity. In defending our national identity we are protecting difference against standardization. The Islamic people loses its identity through the same process. We hope Muslims keep their roots, and don't try to integrate at the expense of them."

Lagane admitted that globalization has its merits. He should: he wears a stylish tattersall shirt, smokes Marlboro Lights, and does his writing on a brand-new Macintosh G3 laptop. (In fact, he left the Front just weeks after our talk, to start his own dot-com company.) "We're not against globalization," he said. "We're against a globalism that destroys the family and the nation." Certainly the National Front has changed since the early 1980s, when it tried to mix Reagan-Thatcher capitalism with a vociferous opposition to the then-prevalent high levels of immigration. The turning point seems to have been the Gulf War, in 1991, even today a staple of Le Pen's oratory, after which the movement adopted a virulently anti-capitalist stance and began to rail against American "imperialism," both economic and cultural. The new National Front seems to view Arabs as natural allies in a struggle against globalism, which it has traditionally viewed as American and Jewish. The Front is not against Israel, Lagane said (rather implausibly), only against its role, in cooperation with America, as policeman in the Middle East; what's more, he was heartened that "the Jewish community is evolving: it's now

less viscerally led by left-wing Jews." He sounded almost like an old-style anti-American in his assurances that "the National Front has no quarrel with the American people."

It's doubtful that we need fear a National Front foreign policy from France anytime soon. But there are disquieting signs all the same. Last February Lionel Jospin visited Jerusalem, where he described Hezbollah guerrilla actions as "terrorist attacks." The ensuing criticism from Arab countries was not as extraordinary as his abandonment by the French left, which had theretofore been urging Jospin to try harder to wrest control of France's foreign policy from President Chirac. The growing weight of the Arab vote in France may be leaving French politicians precious little foreign-policy leeway. If so, that would help to explain why Chirac was the only Western head of state to attend the funeral of the Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad, in June.

IT'S hard to say how much of France's new cosmopolitanism is due to immigration and how much simply to globalization. If there's a Zidane effect, there's also a Michael Jordan effect. "Today," says the political reporter Blandine Grosjean, of the daily national newspaper *Libération*, "assimilation means getting not a beret but a *casquette américaine*"—as the French have come to call those cheap and omnipresent baseball caps. France has always been full of foreigners, but in the past they were foreigners intent on becoming French and joining the world's leading culture. Interest in foreign lands was a matter for elite scholars and exotists. Now Paris is becoming more like New York—the kind of place where one is always able to get good food from many cultures. It was apparent in France by the 1980s that North African couscous had outstripped both rice and potatoes as the country's favorite accompaniment to meat, to become, arguably, the national food of France. Whole streets all over Paris are lined with couscous shops.

Even France's Minister of Education, Jack Lang, who in the early 1980s, as François Mitterrand's first Minister of Culture, railed against the importation of American culture and English words, has mellowed on the issue. Sitting in his office on Place des Vosges, in the Marais district of Paris, Lang told me that he regrets having called France an *excep-*



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tion culturelle back then. "Globalization doesn't have to mean uniformization," he said. Besides, he added, he delights in a lot of American culture. "I love rap, just as I love hip-hop and break dancing. *C'est fantastique*. And in crossing the Atlantic it's transformed." Lang understands the risk: that cultural tolerance will mean not a more inclusive French culture but a "contraband American culture." But for him, the imperatives of anti-racism seem to have overwhelmed those of nationalism. "What's at issue here," he said, "is not protecting a so-called 'purity' of French culture. It's ridiculous. Such a

The French army has Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—but no Muslim—chaplains. Islam's unequal position makes it hard for Muslims to integrate.

purity doesn't exist. That would be chauvinism, racism. I can't bear that."

France operates under constitutional traditions that cause it to move much more cautiously than the United States in fixing racial disparities. It's the Interior Minister who is charged with ensuring harmony among citizens, and every Interior Minister of the 1990s has had an Islam policy. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the Interior Minister from 1997 until his resignation in late August, went further than most. An ideological man, systematic in a way that is pleasing to the French, Chevènement broke with Mitterrand when the latter turned right on economics in the early 1980s. His initiative on Islam, which was signed with the support of four Islamic federations, was firmly grounded in the very French idea of *citoyenneté*. Literally, that's just "citizenship," but it's a more concrete idea in France than in the United States. It carries associations with voting rights, civic participation, cultural assimilation, and absolute equality under the law.

Chevènement tailored his initiative so that it answered at least some of the questions everyone was asking. Along with Claude Allègre, the former Minister of Education, he called for the creation of an Institute of Islamic Studies. This institute would help to create a political lobbying organization among France's disparate and contentious Muslim subpopulations, along the lines of the country's long-standing Protestant Federation. Chevènement urged extending voting rights for noncitizens who have been resident in France for ten years, calling it merely a necessary consequence of the Maastricht agreement that brought France into the European Union. Parts of the initiative will prove to be either gimmicks or brilliant ways of finding loopholes in the 1905 law that France now finds cumbersome. Typical is a tax on halal meat to fund mosques. And in a way that would have quelled the National Front's fears of looming minarets, Chevènement asked Muslims to "integrate the construction of their mosques into the landscape of our cities."

THE person responsible for coordinating Chevènement's policies among ministries for much of his tenure was Patrick Quinqueton, a longtime politician in the Movement of Citizens party. Quinqueton, now a high-ranking official in France's National Police, is a straight shooter with a scholarly bearing and an Abe Lincoln beard. He has long hoped that Chevènement's idea of "citizenship" will cure a lot of ills. "It used to be that access to French nationality was simple," Quinqueton told me last year at the Interior Ministry. He was referring to the short residency requirements—relative to those in other European countries—for settlers seeking French citizenship. "But access to society didn't follow as simply. These [second-generation] young people are today the object of discrimination, in work and in housing—not always as the result of racism." That sounds like a very fine distinction, but he explained: "You can't call this discrimination against immigrants, because in fact they're not immigrants at all. What we look for is access to *citoyenneté*."

Quinqueton rejected affirmative action out of hand. "Thinking about these issues poses that question immediately," he told me. "But we've made the choice not to install such a system. Absolutely not.

France's political and social system—very much attached to the principle of equality—wouldn't accept it. Whatever gives the impression that positions are getting handed out on some basis other than merit winds up shocking people. It provokes other sorts of problems." Yet Quinqueton made the Clintonlike stipulation that the police, for instance, should "look like their communities."

The French state will be under increasing pressure to institute something like affirmative action, even if it comes under a different name. Last May, on the eve of a "black peoples' march" demanding, among other things, more representation in the media, the Minister of Communications, Catherine Tasca, ordered two national television stations, France 2 and France 3, to "more fully take into consideration the diversity of the French population." The French constitutional provision against advancing racial groups seems to be weakening. Although hard quotas are out, soft quotas have arrived, bringing with them a paradox: there is no government program more American than affirmative action, and Americanization is something that everyone in the society—from Socialists to conservatives, from Communists to the National Front—professes to dread.

The big problem is finding a way for the state to respect different religions and cultures without turning itself into an engine of de-assimilation. Fortunately or unfortunately, this problem is new to Europe, and the model for all such racial reconciliations tends to be the one that came out of the American civil-rights movement. Nouredine Hagoug says, "The cardinal mistake was to think of immigration uniquely as an importing of labor. That is, not to consider that these were also human beings, forming families and bringing children into the world. And these things manifestly weren't thought out. A policy built around low-qualification, low-pay labor may have been a good one in the 1970s. But now France is discovering that what it thought of as merchandise turns out to be human beings."☞

See the online version of this article, at www.theatlantic.com/islamfrance, for a Web-only sidebar by Christopher Caldwell on the industrial city of Roubaix, in northern France, and the national youth-employment program Emploi-Jeunes, "a sort of European-style AmeriCorps," which Roubaix has made "the centerpiece of an ambitious, racially sensitive, and controversial urban renewal."

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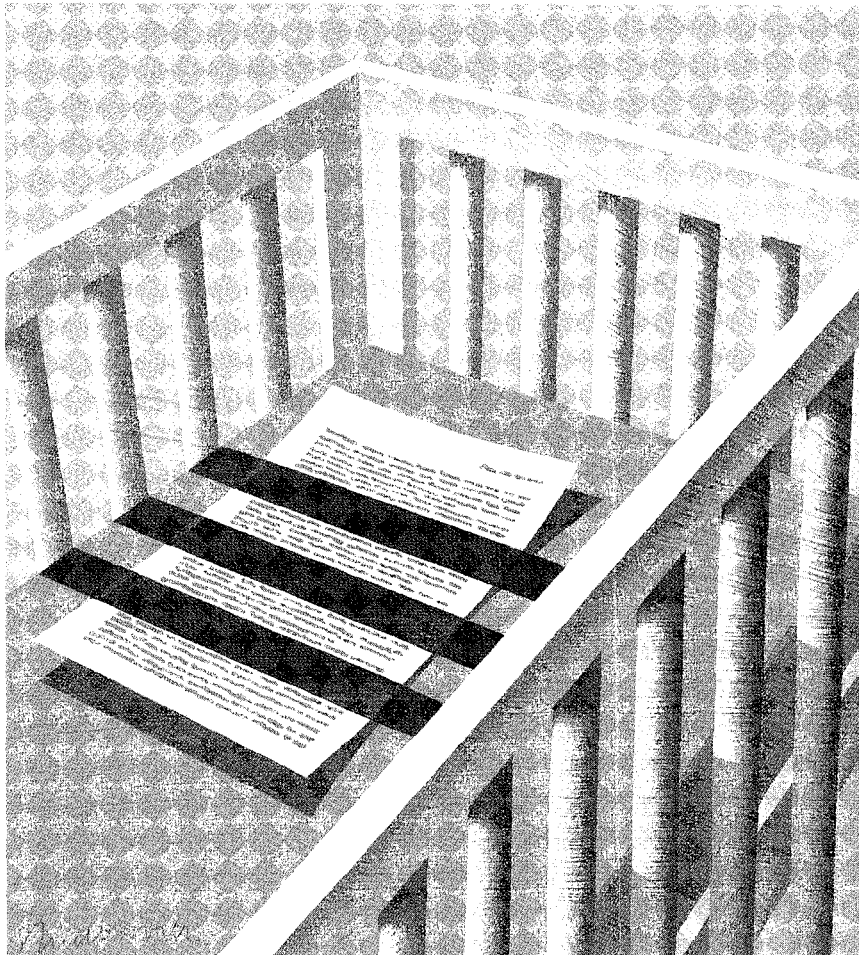


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Children's Products and Risk

The Consumer Product Safety Commission was created to ensure the safety of products for infants, among others. But it can't

LAST year parents, grandparents, and other caregivers spent \$4.9 billion on cribs, cradles, baby carriers, car seats, high chairs, strollers, and other products for infants and toddlers. They were paying for things that were not widely used fifteen or twenty years ago: lightweight portable cribs that easily collapse for storage, car

seats that double as baby carriers, oversized strollers for parents who jog. These products, however, are often hazardous.

by **E. Marla Felcher**

Last year more than 65,000 children were taken to emergency rooms for injuries associated with products for infants—yet most parents are unaware of the dangers.

Because the infant-products industry is

now consolidated in the hands of a few large companies, because distribution is widespread over the Internet and through huge retailers such as Wal-Mart and Babies 'R' Us, and because magazines that target parents have proliferated, manufacturers can rapidly saturate the market with new products. By the time a product is found to be dangerous and recalled, hundreds of thousands or even millions of units may already be in use.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission is the federal agency charged with ensuring the safety of consumer goods. Last year the CPSC recalled ninety-five toys and infant products, adding up to tens of millions of units. Recalls have included certain models of Cosco tandem strollers, after 3,000 complaints that the locks on the folding mechanism failed. This could cause the stroller to collapse unexpectedly, and it resulted in injuries to more than 200 babies, including head injuries and lacerations requiring stitches. Also recalled were some Evenflo Snuggli soft infant carriers, after thirteen reports that babies had fallen through the leg openings, and seven million Graco infant swings made before November of 1997—after 181 falls were reported, twenty-two infants were caught at the neck or the chest, and six children died.

When the CPSC initiates the recall of a product, it generally persuades the manufacturer to notify retailers that the product can no longer be sold and to issue a joint press release specifying why the product has been recalled and what people who own it should do (for example, stop using it and request further instructions from the company). The CPSC sends these press releases to television stations, magazines, and newspapers, and also makes them available on its Web site, at www.cpsc.gov (the commission's hotline phone number is 800-638-2772).

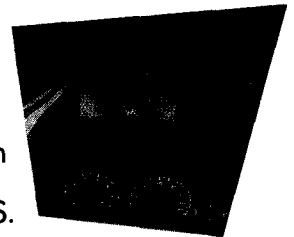
Manufacturers know that strongly worded, alarming press releases are likely to attract reporters' attention. And they know that well-publicized recalls can invite product-liability suits, damage their corporate image, and reduce the value of their stock. The language used in recall press releases is negotiated at highly secretive meetings between CPSC staff members and manufacturers' lawyers,

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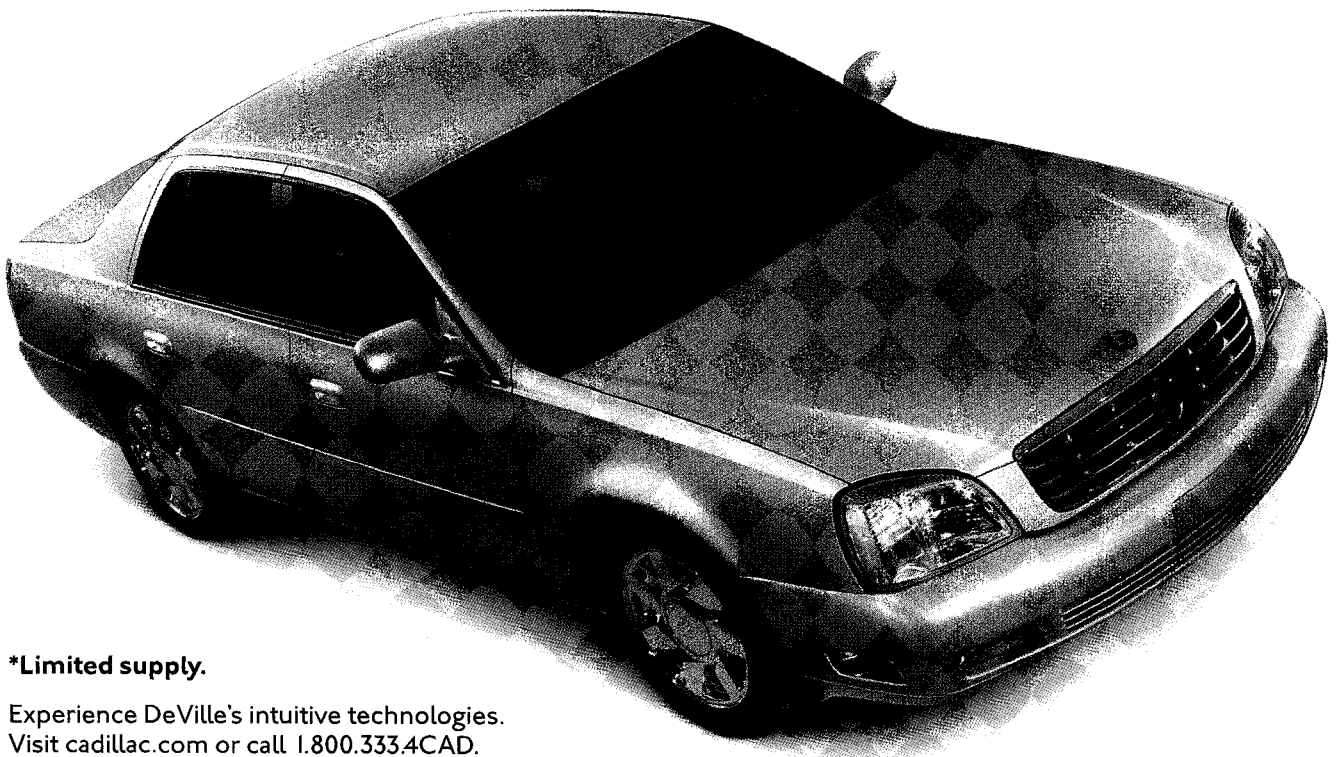


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product engineers, and public-relations experts. "The manufacturer wants to minimize the hazards, and the CPSC wants to maximize them," says Bengt Lager, whose company, Regal Lager, is the exclusive U.S. distributor of Baby Björn products. Manufacturers try to avoid press-release headlines that announce a straight "recall," because they fear that consumers will think the product must be returned. Instead a "recall to repair" will instruct customers to get in touch with the company for a free repair kit. A recall notice in 1995 for the Playskool 1-2-3 high chair (cracked joints sometimes caused the chair to collapse) was headlined "Recall to Repair." In 1997 a press release issued for some models of the same product (this time the restraint bar broke) was headlined "Recall to Repair Restraint Bar," and mentioned nothing about the weak joints. (Hasbro, the owner of the Playskool brand, received at least 4,500 consumer complaints before the chair was recalled the first time.) Thus it is not surprising that these press releases are not always considered newsworthy.

On the afternoon of May 12, 1998, in Chicago, a sixteen-month-old, Danny Keysar, was put down for a nap in a Playskool Travel-Lite portable crib by his day-care provider, Anna. When Anna checked on Danny a little while later, she found that the crib had collapsed while he was standing, trapping his neck in the V of its folded rails. Danny was no longer breathing. Though the toddler weighed only twenty-five pounds, the rails collapsed under his weight, folding shut at the center hinges.

Anna had been caring for the child in her home for ten months, and as a licensed day-care provider, she was required to undergo periodic safety inspections. Illinois inspectors had been to the home just eight days before the incident occurred. After Danny's funeral a newspaper reporter discovered that his death was not an isolated incident: four other children had died in Playskool Travel-Lite cribs. (One other child died three months later.) The government had deemed the Travel-Lite dangerous and had ordered it off the market five years earlier, in a product recall. But it was not the only portable crib that had been recalled. From 1993 to 1997 more than 1.5 million portable cribs with a similar design (center hinges on the top rails)—marketed by other companies whose names parents associate with good

products for children, such as Baby Trend, Century Products, and Evenflo—were recalled (see the CPSC Web site for model numbers). In 1991 an eleven-month-old in Los Angeles became the first baby known to have died in one of these cribs, and Danny is believed to have been the twelfth.

After Danny died, his parents, Linda Ginzel and Boaz Keysar (both professors at the University of Chicago), founded Kids in Danger (www.kidsindanger.org), a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to teaching parents how to protect their children from unsafe products. Ginzel and Keysar initiated and championed the Children's Product Safety Act, which was signed into law in August of last year by the governor of Illinois, George Ryan. The law makes it illegal to sell or lease a children's product that has been recalled, and ensures that recalled products are not used in licensed day-care facilities. Hailed as model legislation by the CPSC, the law was enacted in Michigan last June.

HOW did such a product make its way to store shelves in the first place? When I called the CPSC for an explanation, Russ Rader, the public-affairs officer, told me that his agency was prohibited by the Consumer Product Safety Act from releasing all of the product-specific information I wanted. For thorough answers I turned to the Freedom of Information Act, which provides the public with direct access to documents held by federal agencies.

I filed a request for documents on Baby Trend, Century Products, Draco (not to be confused with Graco, another manufacturer of products for infants), Evenflo, and Playskool portable cribs. It was months before the documents arrived. Section 6(b) of the Consumer Product Safety Act was largely to blame for this delay. Sometimes referred to as a "reverse FOIA," 6(b) requires the CPSC to allow the manufacturer an opportunity to comment on the information (including testing data, consumer complaints, warranty claims) that the CPSC plans to release in response to a FOIA request if the company is identified by name. The CPSC is the only health-and-safety agency with such a restrictive statute.

Over the next year I filed dozens more requests for CPSC files on products certain models of which had been associated

with the injury or death of children, including Safety 1st bed rails and bath seats, Century TraveLite Sport strollers, Century Lil'Napper infant swings, Baby Björn infant carriers, Playskool 1-2-3 high chairs, and Cosco cribs, toddler beds, and infant swings. Most of my requests were answered within three months. But the files had obviously contained information that someone didn't want me to see: individual pages or entire documents had been removed, and sentences had been deleted by hand, with swipes of a black felt-tip pen.

Censorship notwithstanding, the files told a story that the official recall press releases had failed to reveal. Thick with the minutiae of childhood death (autopsy reports, notes of police investigations, pictures of dummies arranged in products to simulate the death scenario, a grandmother's letter describing how her grandson had been caught in the restraint straps of an infant swing and nearly strangled, a CPSC engineer's report concluding that an infant carrier still on the market presented a risk to children), the files described in excruciating detail how children had been injured or had died.

What struck me first about the CPSC files was the frequency of stories like Danny's. A file on certain models of the Graco Converta-Cradle included seventeen investigation reports of incidents, involving nine deaths. A letter to me from the Freedom of Information officer at the CPSC clearly stated that more incidents had occurred but that 6(b) and other Freedom of Information exemptions prevented him from releasing those files to me. The file on baby carriers described 185 incidents from 1990 to 1999, most of them falls. The file on infant swings described fifteen asphyxiation deaths.

One after another, the stories played out the same way. A baby was injured or died at home or at a day-care center. The CPSC was notified. When the CPSC had accumulated sufficient information to suggest that a product was associated with a systematic pattern of injuries or deaths, the agency deemed the product too hazardous to sell, and recalled it. Whereas the Food and Drug Administration has the budget and the authority to

*The language
used in recall
press releases is
negotiated at
highly secretive
meetings
between federal
officials and
manufacturers'
representatives.*

test products before they are put on the market, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has extensive authority to set mandatory safety standards for motor vehicles, the CPSC can do little to prevent inadequately tested products from being sold.

THE U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission was born out of the consumer movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1972, against the wishes of President Richard Nixon, Congress enacted the Consumer Product Safety Act, establishing the CPSC as an independent federal regulatory agency. The CPSC was endowed with broad powers: to create mandatory safety standards for consumer products, to collect and maintain a national database of product-related injuries and deaths, to recall hazardous products, and to ban products that could not be made safe by a standard.

In 1981 President Ronald Reagan pushed for and won from Congress changes that eroded the agency's authority. For example, the CPSC was restricted in its ability to establish mandatory safety

standards for products if their manufacturers agreed to set standards voluntarily. It is Reagan's legacy that few durable baby products are regulated by mandatory government standards today; chief among them are car seats and cribs. (Car seats are regulated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.) Safety standards for almost all others are voluntary.

Safety standards specify which hazards a manufacturer must address and how a product must be tested. A manufacturer can decide to comply with voluntary standards or not, as the term implies. For some products, such as front and back baby carriers, no voluntary standard exists. A committee began work on a standard for plastic carriers with hard handles in November of 1997; it was not finished until July of this year. Few parents and caregivers know this. Nor do they know that since 1996 more than 2.8 million baby carriers of this type have been recalled, all for the same reason: the handles unexpectedly unlatch, and the infant can fall to the ground.

The CPSC has reports of more than 3,000 unlatching incidents and more than a hundred injuries, including skull fractures and concussions.

Most standards are "in development" for two to five years. During this time millions of units might be sold. Standard-setting rarely keeps pace with manufacturers' marketing departments, so new products are the least likely to have been tested according to a uniform standard. Parents take safety for granted, wrongly assuming that the product wouldn't be on the market unless it had passed rigorous government tests.

The Draco All Our Kids portable crib underscores the danger of having voluntary (as opposed to mandatory) safety standards and the CPSC's lack of pre-marketing testing authority. Draco, a Taiwanese company that maintained a small office in California, sold 13,000 portable cribs from 1992 to 1994. The CPSC was alerted to a problem in October of 1994, when a Rhode Island mother reported that her toddler was standing in his crib, leaning on the top rail, and fell when the rail collapsed. The child sustained minor injuries. At the time, CPSC

regulators were well aware of the dangers posed by many other brands of portable cribs; the Playskool Travel-Lite had already been recalled, and others were under investigation.

A Draco employee told CPSC investigators that the company had subjected "prototype samples" of the All Our Kids crib to the structural-integrity test specified by the voluntary standard for play yards and portable cribs: manufacturers' engineers were to apply a fifty-pound vertical force on each of the crib's top rails, at all locations considered likely to fail. According to a letter from the company to the CPSC, Jerry Teng, the president of Draco, and his chief engineer, John Wang, had supervised the development and testing of the All Our Kids crib. But when the CPSC asked for proof of this testing, the company had little to provide, explaining that most of the development was done in Taiwan.

By the time the CPSC recalled the crib, in 1996, Draco had gone out of business, the California office had been vacated with no forwarding address, and Teng had apparently moved back to Asia.

During a recall investigation most large manufacturers can demonstrate to the CPSC that their product complies with a voluntary safety standard—if a standard for that product exists. But voluntary standards often require only minimum levels of performance and fail to address all the known hazards. It is virtually impossible for a parent to know which hazards have been foreseen and forestalled: this information appears nowhere on a product.

Safety standards for infant products are written under the auspices of the American Society for Testing and Materials, which stipulates that all stakeholders (manufacturers, consumer advocates, and the CPSC) must participate in standard-setting discussions. Twice a year committees meet for four days to hash out safety standards. The same 1981 Consumer Product Safety Act amendment that limited the CPSC's right to set mandatory standards requires the agency to assist in the development of voluntary standards. Manufacturers and consumer advocates have a vote, but CPSC representatives do not. At a meeting about hard-handle carriers last February, attendance was typical: twenty-eight manufacturers, their

*The problem is
how to fix a
regulatory system
that allows so many
babies to die in
brand-name
products before and
after the products
are recalled.*



consultants, and staff from their testing labs; seven consumer advocates; one retailer; and one CPSC regulator.

Bath seats, which are designed for bathing an infant in a regular bathtub, illustrate how inadequate this process is. A bath seat, made of plastic, is affixed to the bottom of the tub with suction cups. The baby's legs straddle a plastic post attached to a chest-high plastic ring that surrounds him. The baby can hold on to the ring for support. The CPSC estimates that about a million bath seats a year are sold in the United States—one for every four live births.

Bath seats hit the U.S. market in 1981, with no voluntary safety standard in place. The CPSC first learned of a bath-seat drowning in 1983. By the end of 1994, with eighteen fatalities having been reported, the commission requested that the industry begin work on a voluntary bath-seat standard. Paul Ware, of Safety 1st, was elected to chair the safety-standard committee. Safety 1st is a major player in the bath-seat market, and a safety standard might require a redesign of the product.

The CPSC believed that two features of bath seats were contributing to the ma-

jority of deaths: leg openings that were larger than they needed to be, and suction cups that didn't always do their job. Instead of straddling the plastic post, an infant could fit both legs through one leg opening and then slip through and drown—a phenomenon called "submarining." The agency pushed Ware's committee to prevent such incidents by incorporating a maximum leg opening into the standard. The suction cups were hazardous for two reasons: they came off too easily, and if the bottom of the bathtub was covered with an anti-skid strip or appliqué, the suction cups didn't always stick. Without adequate suction the bath seat was more likely to tip over. The CPSC asked Ware's committee to address these issues, too.

In April of last year, after five years of work, during which time forty-three more infant deaths were reported (including at least ten associated with the Safety 1st bath seat), the bath-seat committee approved the safety standard.

It did not call for any significant structural changes: the leg openings are just as wide, and the suction cups are just as likely to detach. In other words, the committee disregarded the CPSC's requests, the arguments of consumer advocates, and the continuing death toll. The product is as dangerous as it ever was: bath-seat drownings remain stable at a rate of about eight a year.

How can companies market such a dangerous product? They lay the blame for drownings on irresponsible parents, arguing that incidents happen because children are left alone. Parents believe they should never leave a child unattended in a bathtub, yet data on bath-seat drownings indicate that too many caregivers do exactly that. Thinking that a baby is safe in a bath seat, a parent leaves for a minute to answer the phone or to respond to another child. In fact, according to Clay Mann, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Utah who is affiliated with the Intermountain Injury Control Research Center, bath seats increase the probability that a caregiver will leave a child unattended in a bathtub. By providing a "hands-free" support for the baby, bath seats foster the impression that it is safe to leave a child alone "just for a minute," and actually increase the likelihood that a child will drown.

Most large baby-product manufacturers appear to be cognizant of these

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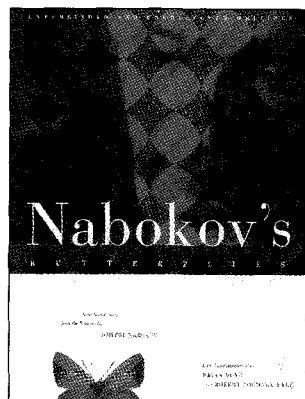
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dangers, and have avoided the bath-seat market altogether. It is ironic, then, that a leading bath-seat manufacturer is named Safety 1st. "One provision CPSC had manufacturers agree to is that they would never put on the outside of the box that the [bath seat] is a 'safety device,'" a CPSC regulator says. "But we couldn't do anything about the name Safety 1st. . . . People just look at their box and look at the name of the company and assume it is a 'safety' product."

On July 25 the Consumer Federation of America and eight other consumer groups filed a petition with the CPSC, asking the agency to ban the product completely, arguing that it poses "an unreasonable risk of injury and death to children."

The risks associated with consumer products will never be completely eliminated. People will always manage to be injured by seemingly innocuous products such as lawn ornaments and videocassette recorders. The problem is not how to prevent deaths that occur in unforeseen, highly improbable circumstances. Rather, the problem is how to fix a regulatory system that allows so many babies to die in brand-name products before *and after* the products are recalled. These deaths were not unforeseen, and more are certain to occur. Manufacturers who fail to test their products sufficiently and a government agency plagued by inadequate funding and restrictive statutes are responsible.

In 1997 a Government Accounting Office report noted that the Consumer Product Safety Commission had carried out its mission with a budget of \$42.5 million, a decrease of 60 percent since 1974 (adjusted for inflation), and a staff of 480—43 percent fewer positions than in 1974. Today the agency's budget is a mere \$50 million, and its staff remains frozen at 480. At the same time, many of the industries the CPSC regulates have grown rapidly—among them, home-improvement equipment, snowmobiles, scooters, and baby products. Clearly, the agency needs more funding to carry out its work. "If I could double our budget," says a CPSC regulator, "the agency would be stronger." At the top of the wish list: funds to hire more engineers and lawyers and to build more-sophisticated testing labs. In the meantime, manufacturers continue to pump new baby products into the retail pipeline, and consumers continue to buy them. ☸

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From Iron Age to Our Age

*The Mediterranean island of Elba
has been gratifying visitors since prehistory*

VISITORS to Italy tend to love Tuscany, and they also love Italy's islands. What could be better than a Tuscan island? Few Americans, it seems, even realize that such a thing exists. In fact there is an entire Tuscan archipelago, the jewel of which is Elba. The island is an hour's ferry ride from the

by Francine Russo

smoggy industrial town of Piombino, which is just two to three hours by car or train from either Florence or Rome. I visited Elba last June, joining Mary and John, friends from the States, on a bicycling vacation. They made the arrangements for the car, the hotel, and the bicycles; I studied up on the sights and

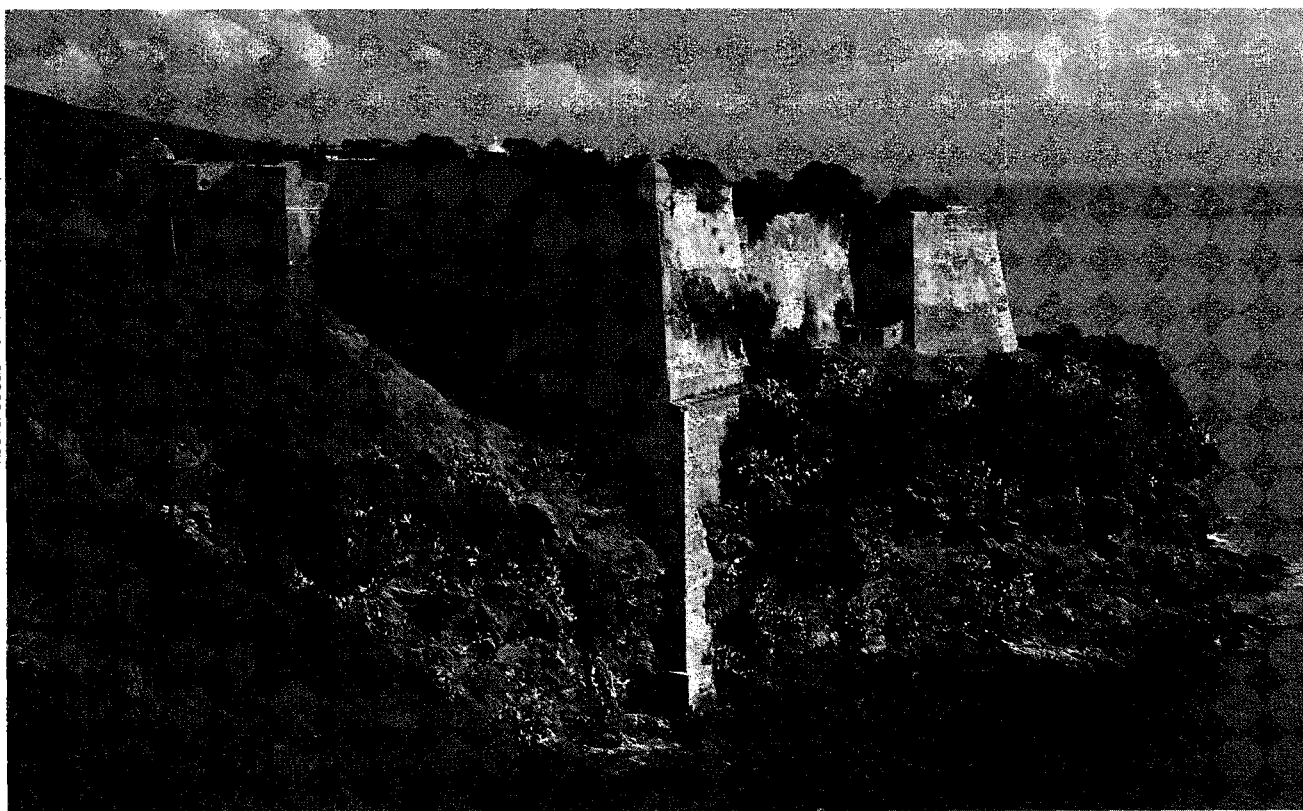
the history, which, of course, prominently features Napoleon.

Napoleon (I now know) told the island's French governor that he had picked Elba as his retreat when he was forced to abdicate the throne as Emperor of France, in 1814. Really he had no choice, but still he got a good deal: he became the island's ruler. And far from being a grim prison island, Elba, seventeen miles long and eleven miles wide, is a natural paradise of towering mountains, lush forests, sheer cliffs, and sweeping bays and beaches. It has been inhabited, coveted, plundered, and fought over since Paleolithic times, and is thickly layered with history—Etruscan and Roman ruins, ancient and medieval hill villages, walled Renaissance towns. Everywhere on harbors, hills, and promontories the island bristles with fortresses, ramparts, and towers.

Blame the mines. Very early on the island's folk discovered rich deposits of iron ore on Elba's eastern slopes and forged the stuff into crude implements. Soon outsiders, too, discovered the iron—and some of the 150 or so other valuable

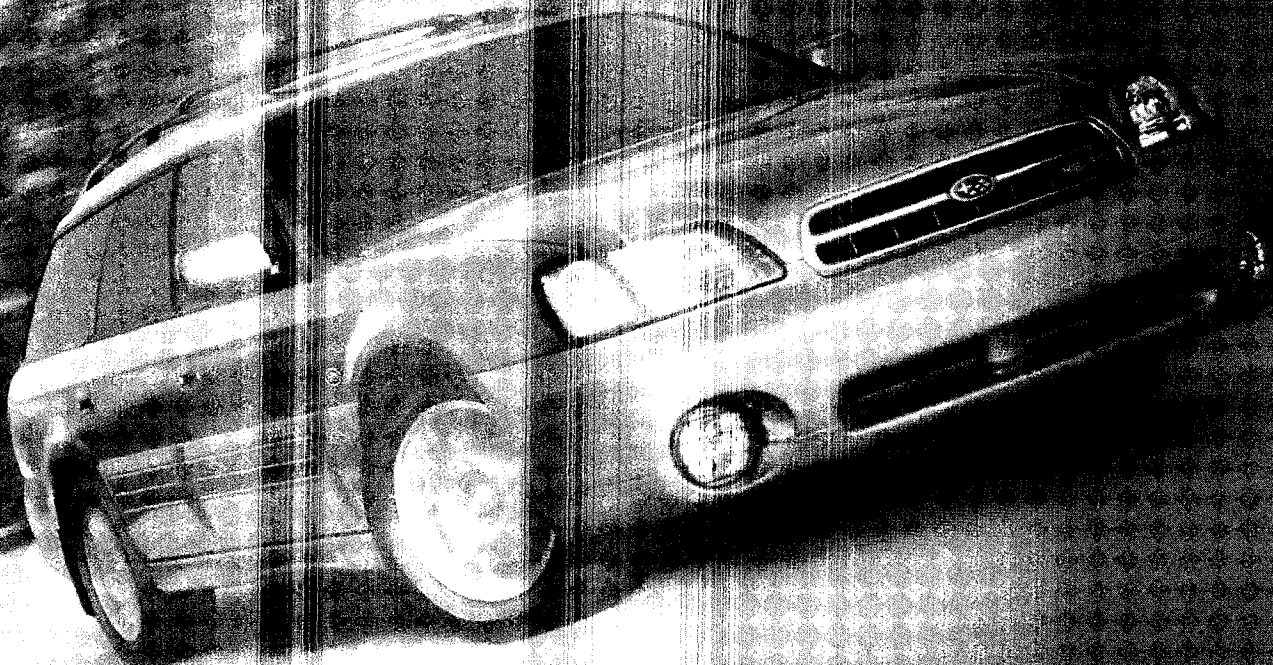
*The Spanish-built Forte Focardo,
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minerals on this little plot of earth. Wielding swords, they came after it in ships. According to myth, Elba's glittering mountains attracted Jason and his Argonauts, who landed on the island in their search for the Golden Fleece. In real history, Greeks had moved in by the tenth century B.C. and were smelting the ore. Etruscans and then other Greeks shouldered them aside. The Romans took over next, mining the island and building luxurious villas overlooking the sea. From the twelfth century until the nineteenth a host of city-states and nations—Pisa, Genoa, Tuscany, Spain, France—traded the island back and forth, divvied it up, lost it, and reclaimed it. Under the peace treaty of Amiens it passed to France in 1802, reverting to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany after Napoleon's stewardship and becoming part of Italy after unification, in 1861.

As you approach Elba by ferry, you can see the red-rock mountains and barren gray moonscape of its iron-stripped eastern end. Round a bend, though, and luxuriantly green mountains and lovely harbors come into view. Elba looks like three separate islands, and is in fact made up of three distinct geological zones, east to west. The ferry lands at Rio Marina, on the east coast, near the iron mountains.

WE were staying at the Hotel Airone, an all-the-trimmings spa on the north coast, just outside Portoferraio, which with about 12,000 residents is the island's only town of any size. I had little interest in the hotel's acres of amenities (tennis courts, swimming pools, and so forth), but after our first day of cycling I did consider treating myself to a "massaggio totale." Alas, the masseuse was all booked, even so early in the season. I toyed with the idea of having a mud bath, but one look at the lake of brown muck on the manicured grounds dissuaded me. Also, the spa's brochure translated the substance—with, I think, unintended candor—as "slime."

I would have preferred an older grand hotel in the walled city to this spanking new resort on the outskirts. But as it turns out, there aren't any. Blame the mines.

There was little need for tourist hotels while the metal refineries belched their persistent cloud of pollution over the island—an era that continued through World War II. It was thirty years before Elba's reputation as a dirty industrial site began to fade. In the seventies a few Italians, Florentines mostly, began to notice its beauty and took housekeeping cottages there for summer escapes. The government, recognizing a new variety of gold mine, in 1996 declared about half of the island a nature preserve—and new

and a list of sights will get you everywhere you want to go.

I was eager to visit Napoleon's house, the Palazzina dei Mulini, in Portoferraio. The city starts atop a promontory and runs down to the sea, draping itself around its bay like two long embracing arms. Embracing and defending: this rocky outpost has been a stronghold for centuries. Cosimo I de' Medici left the imprint that is most evident today. In the 1540s he commissioned three linked fortresses to protect the walled city against marauding pirates. The notorious Barbarossa—or Khair ed-Din, as he was called by his fellow Turks—had been a recent threat. Cosimo set his impregnable citadel on the ruins of fortifications built by the Romans, who had laid their stones over the remnants of an Etruscan outpost.

Nestled between two of Cosimo's fortresses, the Stella fort and the Falcone fort, high above the town and harbor, is Napoleon's mansion. On display there are telling personal items: tiny satin slippers that belonged to Napoleon's sister, Pauline; an engraved announcement of the birth of the Emperor's son; and tender family portraits pointing up Napoleon's warm and fuzzy side as a doting father and a loving husband. "I am in a hermitage 600 feet above sea level with a view of the entire Mediterranean, surrounded by a forest of chestnut trees," he wrote to his second wife, Marie Louise, in August of 1814. "I very much

desire to see you and my son."

The Emperor had for company his court, his mother, and Pauline, but Marie Louise had ensconced herself and the three-year-old Napoleon II at the luxurious Viennese court of her father, Francis I, Emperor of Austria, and showed little interest in so much as visiting her husband in his mini-kingdom. "Mini" is the operative idea here, and though the gallery, reception rooms, and library are decorated in the grand Empire style, all gilt and velvet draperies, the house resonates with Napoleon's diminished fortunes. Nonetheless, Napoleon held court here and drew many visitors from abroad, especially English ones. He also had a country house, the Villa di San Martino,



Elba's hill towns are rife with flowers

resorts, from the splendid to the utilitarian, began springing up in towns all along the coast (you'll find many of them listed at www.venere.it/elba/elba.html).

There are some wealthy folks' villas near the beaches, and some very expensive-looking yachts in the harbors, but Elba remains a relaxed, unpretentious island, where Italians of all classes, and many Germans, vacation. Menus, newspapers, brochures—everything on Elba is in either Italian or German, although you might get a few halting words of English from hotel staff members. So unless you have at least a smattering of Italian or German (I had some of the former and less of the latter), you'd best do your research beforehand. As it happens, a simple map

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which can be visited, but it is generally described as “modest,” and apparently not even Napoleon went there much. He was too busy riding everywhere on horseback—supervising road building, modernizing agriculture, encouraging fishing, and, above all, sharpening his tiny army and navy into readiness for his escape.

In the formal gardens behind the house it seemed to me that I could imagine the exiled conqueror’s brooding thoughts as he gazed over the balustrade where I now stood, toward the lighthouse of the Stella fort, the sparkling bay, and, across it, the green mountains of the Tuscan coast. Napoleon spent only ten months here before making his triumphal—if brief—return to France and power. No one thinks that St. Helena, in the South Atlantic, to which he was finally banished, is half as nice as Elba.

THOUGH there are a number of little museums on Elba (for instance, an archaeological museum in Marciana Alta and a mining museum in Rio Marina), it’s the villages themselves that are the most redolent of history. Besides, they’re charming. Most days we would set out

the mountains toward Mount Capanne, whose granite peak, at 3,300 feet, is the highest point of the island. Eventually we reached Poggio, a village of colorful stucco houses with flowers cascading over high garden walls. These rose along twisty passageways of stone steps—some mosaics of pebbles, others patterns of gray slabs. As I made my way to the age-darkened Chiesa di San Defendente, a small but impressive-looking early-sixteenth-century church, I saw very few people about. The church bells, striking eleven, echoed off the walls. Poggio is the site of the Fonte di Napoleone, an ancient spring whose waters are served in seemingly every restaurant on the island. We filled our bottles with the delicious water pouring from a pipe jutting out of the mountain onto the road.



lunch the three of us wandered through a peach-colored stone archway labeled “Porta Medioevale di Lorena” into a crumbling-walled town of many stairways, and up to the ruins of a hulking twelfth-century Pisan fortress. The highest town commanding a view of the water, Marciana served the Pisans as a kind of early-warning system against pirate raiders.

Another day we went swimming just down the mountain at Marciana Marina, a bustling town that contains one of the island’s fifty or so beaches. Pick your favorite: they come with fine golden sand, rough and rocky, buffered by jetties, walled off by sheer cliffs, and in quite a few other permutations. Last year an Italian group called the Environment League named Marciana Marina the best beach in Italy, because of its pristine waters. We weren’t crazy about walking on its small round stones, despite the canvas runner draped over them by the beach-chair-and-umbrella man. But swimming in that clear water was heaven. Splashing and lounging against the rocks in the water, we rested our heads on pillows of spongy marine life of kinds we’d never before seen—green mossy stuff and tiny, sliver-thin mushroom-shaped plants waving in the current.

The island is densely packed with settlements, and we saw a lot—the old fishing village of Porto Azzurro, with its Spanish-built fortresses; the ruins of an imperial Roman villa, its walls facing views of the bay in three directions; the busy workaday beach town of Procchio, where we bought peaches so sweet and juicy that we had to wade into the water to wash off their stickiness. We also missed a lot—Etruscan ruins, medieval chapels, and the mining towns of Capoliveri and Rio Marina. With its nearly unparalleled endowment of minerals, Elba attracts both scientists and amateur rock collectors. If you want to collect anything from amethysts and beryls to garnets and tourmalines, you can buy specimen cards in the shops to show you what you’re looking for.

THIS PAGE: VISION/GRAZIA NERI



The Villa di San Martino, Napoleon’s little-used country home

for one on our bicycles. Since the island is so small, bikes are a great way to see it; the drawback is that all those picturesque hill towns are . . . on top of hills. Unless you’re a more stalwart rider than I am, you’ll want a car, too. (You can rent one on the island or bring one over from the mainland on the ferry.)

One day Mary, John, and I bicycled into

A little farther up the same road is Marciana Alta, a wine-growing center and one of Elba’s oldest settlements. We ate at one of a row of outdoor cafés, on a tree-shaded terrace overlooking the sea. We picked a café that served unusual *panini* and *insalati*: my salad was a tasty bowl of fresh-cooked peas wound through with strips of pancetta and mozzarella. After



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One sunny morning we donned life jackets, wedged ourselves into sea kayaks, and paddled as part of a group away from the sandy beach at Marina di Campo, a town on the south coast. We slid past deserted coves, rocky bays, and soaring cliffs, accompanied by Umberto, an Elban guide and kayak renter. We picnicked on a stony beach between sheer cliffs, floated on churning white water between giant rocks (the ultimate Jacuzzi), and glided into caves hollowed out by the sea to look up at their fanciful stalactites.

As we paddled back, Umberto kept up a steady stream of commentary. I struggled to lift my tired arms and to understand his Italian while he pointed things out: jagged shelves of rock created by volcanic action, little green succulents growing out of the cliffs. "*Finocchio di mare*," he explained—whence comes a strong spice that's delicious with fish. When we reached a point where we could see no land but the Elban coast, he paused and pointed dramatically in three directions: "*Sicilia. Roma. Africa.*" My Italian was up to this.

The sun was intense that day, as it tends to be in June. May and October are considered the ideal times to visit Elba, but even in November, and again in March and April, the temperature gets into the high sixties during the day. In the early spring

Umberto (who has his own Web site: www.elbalink.it/aziende/viottolo) leads people on serious trekking and mountain-biking expeditions in the very wild parts of the mountains. In fact, international mountain-biking competitions are held here annually in May and October.

We ate most of our dinners in Portoferraio, where the restaurants are all casual, the cuisine is Tuscan, and the fish is fantastic. One night we ate very well at Stella Marina, the local favorite—although travel writers, we were told, are more likely to tout the Trattoria La Barca. We tried that another night, and it, too, was terrific—you pick your own fish off the ice, pay by the pound, and order it the way you like it: grilled, baked, or fried. My favorite dishes on Elba were the *insalata di mare*, a mixture of fat, tender little sea creatures and chewy tentacled things, all shiny with olive oil; pappardelle with conch in the shell; and *ravioli al salmone*.

When our stay was almost over, we had dinner at the Osteria Libertaria, a small restaurant at the end of the main drag, overlooking Portoferraio's harbor. The grizzled, no-nonsense owner, impressive of beard and belly, sat the three of us out front with another diner, at a long table covered with a blue-and-white-checked oilcloth. The other diner was Margaret, a retired bureaucrat from

Bonn, who spoke English well but knew no Italian. Ordering was an adventure. When our phrase books were no help with the menu, I asked Margaret to translate the German on it into English. What was this "*Chiocciola pesto*" or "*Schnecke*"? "Snake," she replied, tentatively. Surely not. Well, she pantomimed, it moved on the ground and had a shell. Turtle? No, no legs. After a while we gave it up. Suddenly Margaret exclaimed triumphantly, "Escargot!"

Well, I ordered them, and they looked like little garden snails to me—tiny shells whose smidgens of meat had to be extracted with a toothpick, a bit bland in a thin pesto sauce. But my main course, *orata*, a white fish, baked in paper with butter and pungent fresh thyme, was exquisite.

As we lingered over dinner, wishing we could remain on Elba longer, the sky grew dark and the lights came up around the harbor and glimmered on the water. Boats rocked gently at their moorings, and a round medieval tower sitting smack in the middle of the bay gleamed red and strange, its narrow slits trained toward generations of long-dead pirates. If they had known better, I like to think, they would have come as tourists. ☼

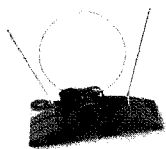
Poggio, part of the way up Mount Capanne, Elba's highest peak

ANDREA PISTOLESI



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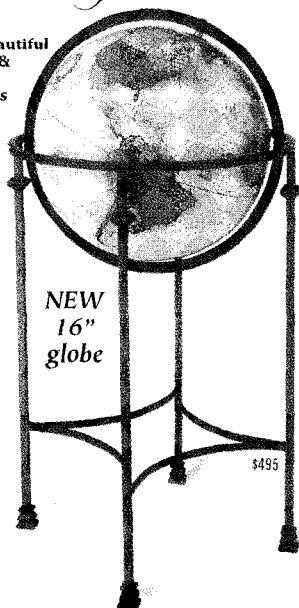


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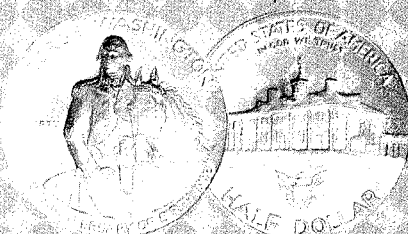
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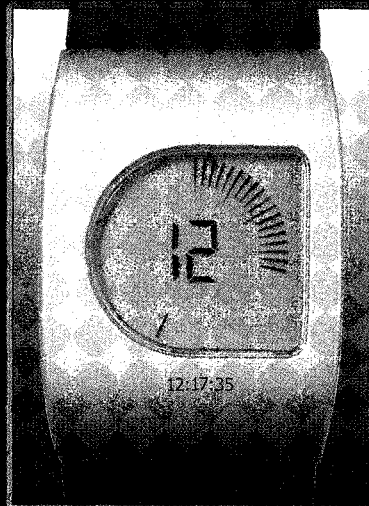
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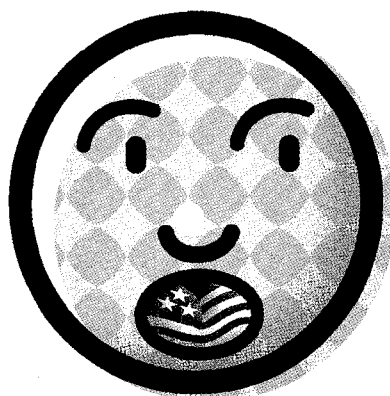
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What Global Language ?

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

BECAUSE I am interested in what happens to the English language, over the past year or so I've been asking people, at dinner parties and professional gatherings and so on, whether they think that English is well on its way to being the global language. Typically, they look puzzled about why I would even bother to ask such an obvious question. They say firmly, Of course. Then they start talking about the Internet. We're just having a conversation, so I refrain from launching into everything I'm about to tell you. It's not that I believe they're actually wrong. But the idea of English as a global language doesn't mean what they think it does—at least, not according to people I've interviewed whose professions are bound up especially closely in what happens to the English language.

English has inarguably achieved some sort of global status. Whenever we turn on the news to find out what's happening in East Asia, or the Balkans, or Africa, or South America, or practically anyplace, local people are being interviewed and telling us about it in English. This past April the journalist Ted Anthony, in one of two articles about global English that he wrote for the Associated Press, observed, "When Pope John Paul II arrived in the Middle East last month to retrace Christ's footsteps

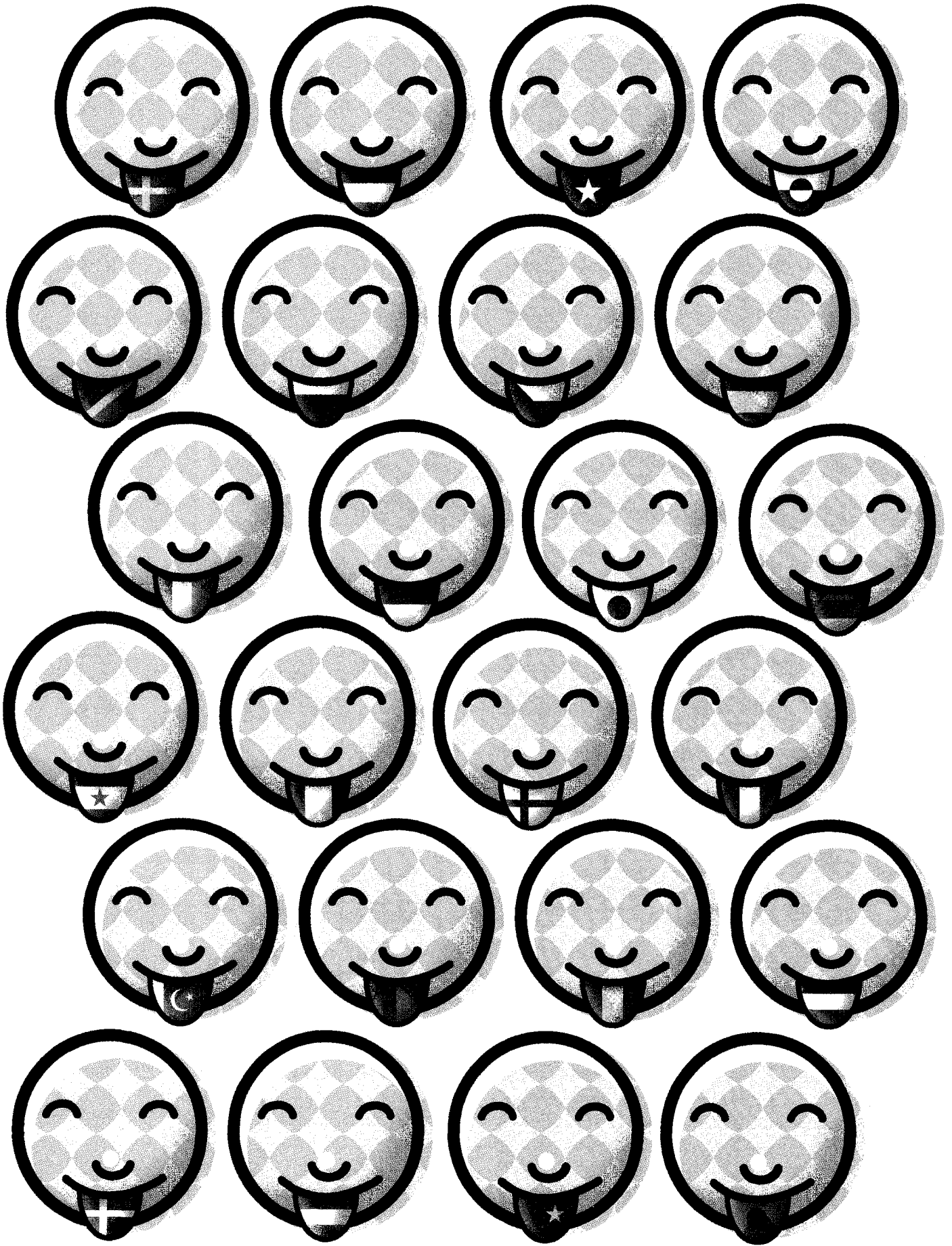


and addressed Christians, Muslims and Jews, the pontiff spoke not Latin, not Arabic, not Hebrew, not his native Polish. He spoke in English."

Indeed, by now lists of facts about the amazing reach of our language may have begun to sound awfully familiar. Have we heard these particular facts before, or only others like them?

English is the working language of the Asian trade group ASEAN. It is the de facto working language of 98 percent of German research physicists and 83 percent of German research chemists. It is the official language of the European Central Bank, even though the bank is in Frankfurt and neither Britain nor any other predominantly English-speaking country is a member of the European Monetary Union. It is the language in which black parents in South Africa overwhelmingly wish their children to be educated. This little list of facts comes from British sources: a report, *The Future of English?*, and a follow-up newsletter that David Graddol, a language researcher at The Open University, and his consulting firm, The English Company U.K., wrote in 1997 and 1998 for the British Council, whose mission is to promote British culture worldwide; and *English as a Global Language* (1997), a book by David Crystal, who is a professor at the University of Wales.

*English isn't managing to sweep all else before it—and if it ever does
become the universal language, many of those who speak it
won't understand one another*



And yet, of course, English is not sweeping all before it, not even in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, ten years ago about one in seven people in this country spoke a language other than English at home—and since then the proportion of immigrants in the population has grown and grown. Ever-wider swaths of Florida, California, and the Southwest are heavily Spanish-speaking. Hispanic people make up 30 percent of the population of New York City, and a television station there that is affiliated with a Spanish-language network has been known to draw a larger daily audience than at least one of the city's English-language network affiliates. Even Sioux City, Iowa, now has a Spanish-language newspaper. According to the census, from 1980 to 1990 the number of Spanish-speakers in the United States grew by 50 percent.

Over the same decade the number of speakers of Chinese in the United States grew by 98 percent. Today approximately 2.4 million Chinese-speakers live in America, and more than four out of five of them prefer to speak Chinese at home. The rate of growth of certain other languages in the United States has been higher still. From 1980 to 1990 the number of speakers of Korean increased by 127 percent and of speakers of Vietnamese by 150 percent. Small American towns from Huntsville, Alabama, to Meriden, Connecticut, to Wausau, Wisconsin, to El Cenizo, Texas—all sites of linguistic controversy in recent years—have been alarmed to find that many new arrivals do not speak English well and some may not even see the point of going to the trouble of learning it.

How can all of this, simultaneously, be true? How can it be that English is conquering the globe if it can't even hold its own in parts of our traditionally English-speaking country?

A perhaps less familiar paradox is that the typical English-speaker's experience of the language is becoming increasingly simplified, even as English as a whole grows more complex. If these two trends are occurring, and they are, then the globalization of English will never deliver the tantalizing result we might hope for: that is, we monolingual English-speakers may never be able to communicate fluently with everyone everywhere.

If we want to exchange anything beyond rudimentary messages with many of our future fellow English-speakers, we may well need help from something other than English.

The evidence strongly suggests that the range of realistic hopes and fears about the English language is narrower than some may suppose. Much discussion of what is likely to happen to English is colored, sometimes luridly, by what people dread or desire—for their children, their neighborhoods, their nations, their world. Human aspirations, of course, have a

great deal to do with what comes to pass. And language is very much tied up with aspirations.

Last fall I visited David Graddol at The English Company's headquarters, in Milton Keynes, England. Graddol has a rumpled appearance somewhat at odds with the crisp publications, replete with graphs and pie charts and executive summaries, for which he is responsible. Similarly, the appearance of The English Company's offices, located in the ground-floor flat of a Victorian house and sparsely furnished with good Arts and Crafts antiques together with some flea-market stuff, is amiably out of keeping with the sophisticated, high-tech nature of the consultancy's work. Stuck on the wall above the stove, in the kitchen, were four clocks, each captioned with a big letter hand-drawn on a piece of paper: *M, K, M, A*. This was to help the staff remember what time it was in Malaysia, Kazakhstan, Mozambique, and Argentina, the four sites where officials and advisers on how to teach English throughout those countries were taking part in an online seminar moderated by The English Company.

"The main message," Graddol told me, "is that the global-



ization of English isn't going to happen the way people expect it to." He ticked off a dizzying array of eventualities that could transform the world language picture: political alliances that have yet to be formed; the probable rise of regional trading blocs, in such places as Asia; the Arab world, and Latin America, in which the United States and other primarily English-speaking countries will be little involved; the possibility that world-changing technological innovations will arise out of nations where English is little spoken; a backlash against

American values and culture in the Middle East or Asia; or the triumph of our values and culture in those places.

To understand the fundamental paradoxes of global English, though, we should focus on two realms of possibility: demographics and technology—yes, the Internet, but much else that's technological besides.

First, Second, or Foreign Language

PEOPLE who expect English to triumph over all other languages are sometimes surprised to learn that the world today holds three times as many native speakers of Chinese as native speakers of English. "Chinese," as language scholars use the word, refers to a family of languages and dialects the most widely spoken of which is Mandarin, and which share a written language although they are not all mutually intelligible when spoken. "English" refers to a family of languages and dialects the most widely spoken of which is standard American English, and which have a common origin in England—though not all varieties of English, either, are mutually intelligible. The versions of English used by educated speakers practically anywhere can be understood by most Americans, but pidgins, creoles, and diverse dialects belong to the same family, and these are not always so generally intelli-

In any case, the numerical gap is impressive: about 1,113 million people speak Chinese as their mother tongue, whereas about 372 million speak English. And yet English is still the world's second most common native language, though it is likely to cede second place within fifty years to the South Asian linguistic group whose leading members are Hindi and Urdu. In 2050, according to a model of language use that The English Company developed and named "engco" after itself, the world will hold 1,384 million native speakers of Chinese, 556 million of Hindi and Urdu, and 508 million of English. As native languages Spanish and Arabic will be almost as common as English, with 486 million and 482 million speakers respectively. And among young people aged fifteen to twenty-four English is expected to be in fourth place, behind not only Chinese and the Hindi-Urdu languages but also Arabic, and just ahead of Spanish.

Certainly, projections of all kinds perch atop teetering stacks of assumptions. But assuming that the tallies of native languages in use today are roughly accurate, the footing for projections of who will speak what as a first language fifty years from now is relatively sturdy. That's because many of the people who will be alive in fifty years are alive now; a majority of the *parents* of people who will be here then are already here; and most people's first language is, of course, the first language of their parents.

Prod at this last idea, to see how it takes into account such things as immigration and bilingual or multilingual places, and you'll find that it is not rock-solid. By David Crystal's estimate, for example, two thirds of the world's children grow up in bilingual environments and develop competence in two languages—so it is an open question what the native language of a good many of those children is. Then, too, a range of population projections exists, and demographers keep tinkering with them all.

But it's undeniable that English-speakers now have lower birth rates, on average, than speakers of Hindi and Urdu and Arabic and Spanish. And the countries where these other languages are spoken are, generally, less well developed than native-English-speaking countries. In 1996, according to United Nations statistics, 21 percent of males and 38 percent of females in "less developed regions" were illiterate in every language, as were 41 and 62 percent in the "least developed countries." Nonetheless, the gains that everyone expects English to make must come because it is adopted as a second language or a foreign language by most of the people who speak it. According to "The Decline of the Native Speaker," a paper David Graddol published last year in the *AILA Review* (AILA is the French acronym for the International Association of Applied Linguistics; the review belongs to the minority of international scholarly journals that still make use of another language in addition to English), the

"THE MAIN MESSAGE," DAVID GRADDOL SAID, "IS THAT THE GLOBALIZATION OF ENGLISH ISN'T GOING TO HAPPEN THE WAY PEOPLE EXPECT IT TO." HE TICKED OFF A DIZZYING ARRAY OF EVENTUALITIES.

gible. To hear for yourself how far English now ranges from what we Americans are used to, you need only rent a video of the 1998 Scottish film *My Name Is Joe*, which, though in English, comes fully subtitled.

"Native speaker" is no easier to define with any precision than "Chinese" or "English," although it means roughly what you'd think: a person who grew up using the language as his or her first. In terms of how demographic patterns of language use are changing, native speakers are not where the action is. And the difference between native speakers and second- or foreign-language speakers is an important one subjectively as well as demographically. The subjective distinction I mean will be painfully familiar to anyone who, like me, spent years in school studying a foreign language and is now barely able to summon enough of it to order dinner in a restaurant.

proportion of native English-speakers in the world population can be expected to shrink over the century 1950–2050 from more than eight to less than five percent.

A few more definitions will be helpful here. “Second-language” speakers live in places where English has some sort of official or special status. In India, for instance, the national government sanctions the use of English for its business, along with fifteen indigenous languages. What proportion of India’s population of a billion speaks English is hotly debated, but most sources agree it is well under five percent. All the same, India is thought to have the fourth largest population of English-speakers in the world, after the United States, the United Kingdom, and Nigeria—or the third largest if you discount speakers of Nigerian pidgin English. English is a second language for virtually everyone in India who speaks it. And obviously the United States, too, contains speakers of English as a second language—some 30 million of them in 1995, according to an estimate by David Crystal.

“Foreign-language” speakers of English live in places where English is not singled out in any formal way, and tend to learn it to communicate with people from elsewhere. Examples might be Japanese who travel abroad on business and Italians who work in tourism in their own country. The distinction between the two categories of non-native speakers is sometimes blurry. In Denmark and Sweden the overwhelming majority of children are taught English in school—does that constitute a special status?

The distinction between categories of speakers matters, in part because where English is a first or second language it develops local standards and norms. India, for instance, publishes dictionaries of Indian English, whereas Denmark and Sweden tend to defer to Britain or the United States in setting standards of English pronunciation and usage. The distinction also matters in relation to how entrenched English is in a given place, and how easy that place would find it to abandon the language.

One more surprise is how speculative any estimate of the use of English as a second or a foreign language must necessarily be. How large an English vocabulary and how great a command of English grammar does a person need in order to be considered an English-speaker? Generally, even the most rigorous attempts to determine how many people speak what, including the U.S. Census, depend on self-reporting. Do those years of French in high school and college entitle us to declare ourselves bilingual? They do if we want them to. Language researchers readily admit that their statistics on second- and foreign-language use are, as Graddol put it in “The Decline of the Native Speaker,” “educated guesswork.”

David Crystal, in his *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995), observed that only 98 million second-language speakers of English in the world could be totted up with certainty. In *English as a Global Language*, though, he argued that the true number was more nearly 350 million. Graddol put forward a variety of estimates in “The Decline of

the Native Speaker,” including Crystal’s, and explained why each had its proponents. According to the most expansive of them, the number of second-language speakers was 518 million in 1995. From 98 million to 518 million is quite a range.

Estimates of the number of foreign-language speakers of English range more widely still. Crystal reports that these “have been as low as 100 million and as high as 1,000 million.” The estimates *would* vary, because by definition foreign-language speakers live in places where English has no official or special status. They may or may not have been asked in a national census or other poll about their competence in English or other languages; they may or may not have had any formal schooling in English; their assessment of their ability to speak English may or may not be accurate.

This last point is particularly worth bearing in mind. According to recent “Eurobarometer” surveys described by Graddol, “77% of Danish adults and 75% of Swedish adults for example, say they can take part in a conversation in English.” And “nearly one third of the citizens of the 13 ‘non English-speaking’ countries in the EU ‘can speak English well enough to take part in a conversation.’” However, Richard Parker, in his book *Mixed Signals: The Prospects for Global Television News* (1995), reported this about a study commissioned by Lintas, a major media buyer, in the early 1990s:

When ad researchers recently tested 4,500 Europeans for “perceived” versus “actual” English-language skills, the results were discouraging. First, the interviewees were asked to evaluate their English-language abilities, and then to translate a series of sample English phrases or sentences. The study produced, in its own words, “sobering” results: “the number of people really fit for English-language television turned out to be less than half the expected audience.” In countries such as France, Spain, and Italy, the study found, fewer than 3 percent had excellent command of English; only in small markets, such as Scandinavia and the Low Countries did the numbers even exceed 10 percent.

So the number of people in the world who speak English is unknown, and how well many of them speak and understand it is questionable. No one is arguing that English is not widely spoken and taught. But the vast numbers that are often repeated—a billion English-speakers, a billion and a half—have only tenuous grounding in reality.

I have never seen any tables or charts that rank languages according to the proportions of the world’s population expected to be using them as second or foreign languages ten or fifty years from now. The subject is just too hypothetical, the range of variables too great. Consider, for instance, the side effects that the breakup of the Soviet Union has had on the use of the Russian language. Now that no central authority seeks to impose Russian on schoolchildren throughout the Soviet bloc, few countries besides Russia itself require students to learn it, and for the most part the language is less and less used. However, in places including the Caucasus, Russian continues to

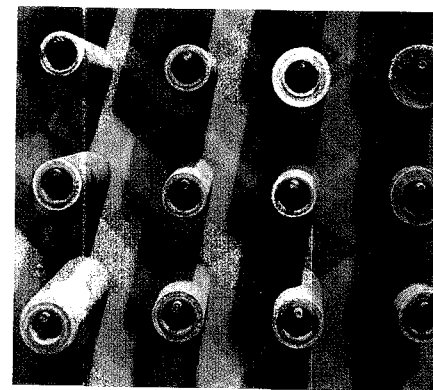


Madeleine Johnson, CEO of LPS Industries, Moonachie, New Jersey

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be valued as a lingua franca, and fluency in it remains a hallmark of an educated person.

Consider, too, the slender thread by which Canada's linguistic fate hung not long ago. In November of 1995 Quebec held a referendum to determine whether most of its citizens were in favor of independence. If 27,000 of the 4.65 million Quebecers who voted had cast their ballots for secession rather than against, by now Canada's entire population of some 30 million people, all of them in theory bilingual, might conceivably be on the way to being largely monolingual—the nation of Quebec in French and what remained of Canada in English.

In the United States, discounting the claims that antagonists make about the other side's position, it's hard to find anyone who doesn't think it would be nice if everyone in the United States spoke English. Virtually all the impassioned debate is about whose resources should be devoted to making this happen and whether people should be encouraged to speak or discouraged from speaking other languages, too. All kinds of things have the potential to change the rate at which English as a second language is learned in the United States. Suppose that nationwide, English lessons were available free (as they already are in some parts of the country) and that employers offered workers, and schools offered parents, incentives to take them. Who can say what effect this would have?

Patterns of learning foreign languages are more volatile still. When I visited David Graddol, last fall, The English Company was reviewing materials the Chinese government had created to be used by 400,000 Chinese instructors in teaching English to millions of their compatriots. Maybe this was a step in an inexorable process of globalization—or maybe it wasn't. Plans to teach English widely in China might change if relations between our two countries took a disastrous turn. Or the tipping point could be something completely undramatic, such as the emergence of an array of Chinese-language Web sites. The information-technology expert Michael Dertouzos told me not long ago that at a conference he had attended in Taipei, the Chinese were grumbling about having to use English to take advantage of the Internet's riches.

Several Languages Called English

MUCH of what will happen to English we can only speculate about. But let's pursue an idea that language researchers regard as fairly well grounded: native speakers of English are already outnumbered by second-language and foreign-language speakers, and will be more heavily outnumbered as time goes on.

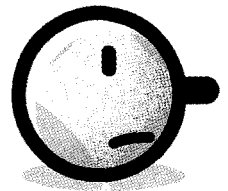
One obvious implication is that some proportion of the people using English for business or professional purposes around the world aren't and needn't be fluent in it. Recently I talked with Michael Henry Heim, a professor of Slavic literatures at the University of California at Los Angeles and a profession-

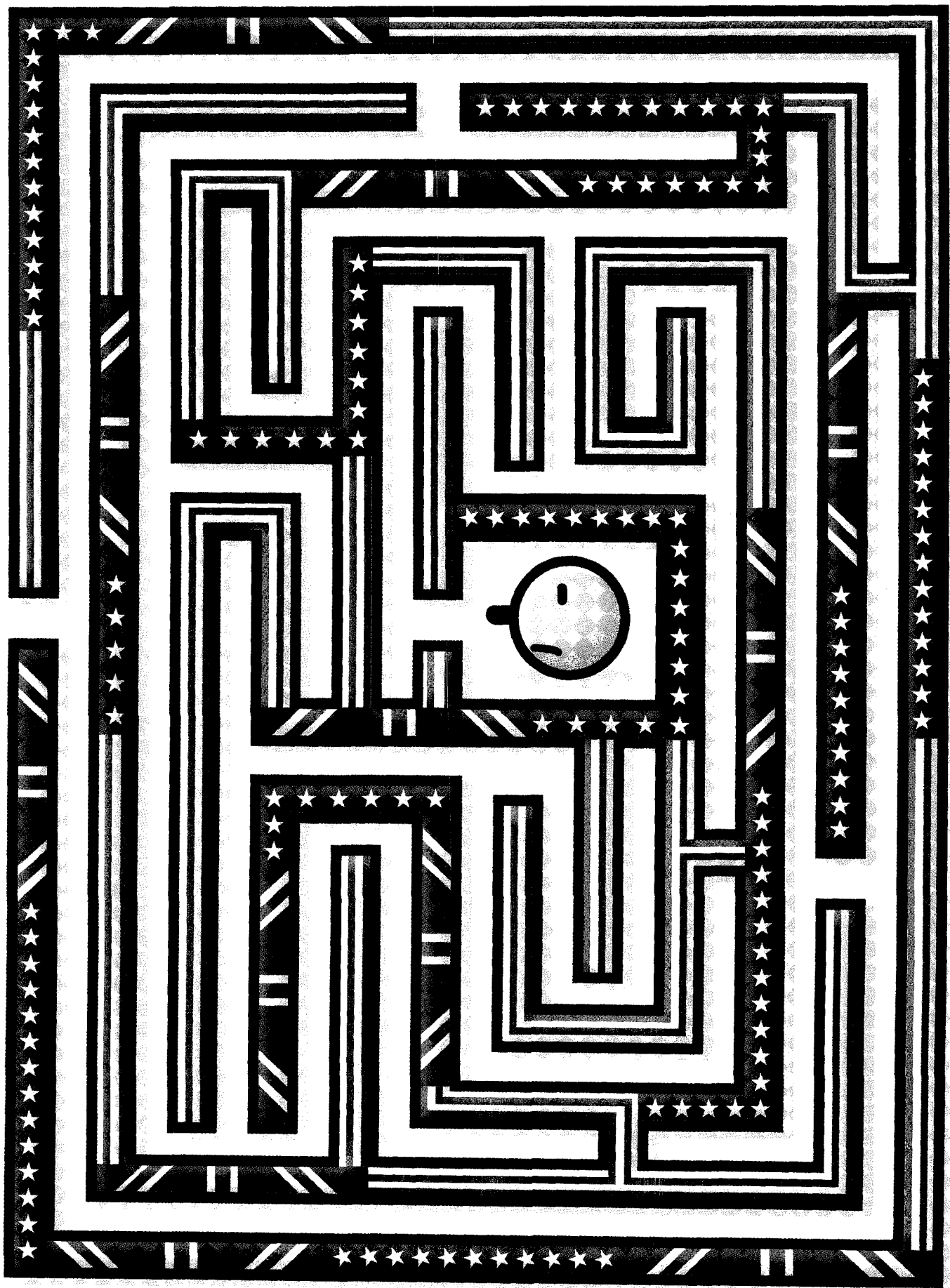
al translator who has rendered into English major works by Milan Kundera and Günter Grass. By his count, he speaks "ten or so" languages. He told me flatly, "English is much easier to learn poorly and to communicate in poorly than any other language. I'm sure that if Hungary were the leader of the world, Hungarian would not be the world language. To communicate on a day-to-day basis—to order a meal, to book a room—there's no language as simple as English."

Research, though, suggests that people are likely to find a language easier or harder to learn according to how similar it is to their native tongue, in terms of things like word order, grammatical structure, and cognate words. As the researcher Terence Odlin noted in his book *Language Transfer* (1989), the duration of full-time intensive courses given to English-speaking U.S. foreign-service personnel amounts to a rough measurement of how different, in these ways, other languages are from English. Today the courses for foreign-service employees who need to learn German, Italian, French, Spanish, or Portuguese last twenty-four weeks. Those for employees learning Swahili, Indonesian, or Malay last thirty-six weeks, and for people learning languages including Hindi, Urdu, Russian, and Hungarian, forty-four weeks. Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean take eighty-eight weeks. Note that all the world's other commonest native languages except Spanish are in the groups most demanding of English-speakers. It might be reasonable to suppose that the reverse is also true—that Arabic- and Chinese-speakers find fluency in English to be more of a challenge than Spanish-speakers do.

A variety of restricted subsets of English have been developed to meet the needs of nonfluent speakers. Among these is Special English, which the Voice of America began using in its broadcasts experimentally some forty years ago and has employed part-time ever since. Special English has a basic vocabulary of just 1,500 words (*The American Heritage Dictionary* contains some 200,000 words, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* nearly 750,000), though sometimes these words are used to define non-Special English words that VOA writers deem essential to a given story. Currently VOA uses Special English for news and features that are broadcast a half hour at a time, six times a day, seven days a week, to millions of listeners worldwide.

But restricted forms of English are usually intended for professional communities. Among the best known of these is Seaspeak, which ships' pilots around the world have used for the past dozen years or so; this is now being supplanted by SMCP, or "Standard Marine Communication Phrases," which is also derived from English but was developed by native speakers of a variety of languages. Airplane pilots and air-traffic controllers use a restricted form of English called Airspeak.





Certainly, the world's ships and airplanes are safer if those who guide them have some language in common, and restricted forms of English have no modern-day rivals for this role. The greatest danger language now seems to pose to navigation and aviation is that some pilots learn only enough English to describe routine situations, and find themselves at a loss when anything out of the ordinary happens.

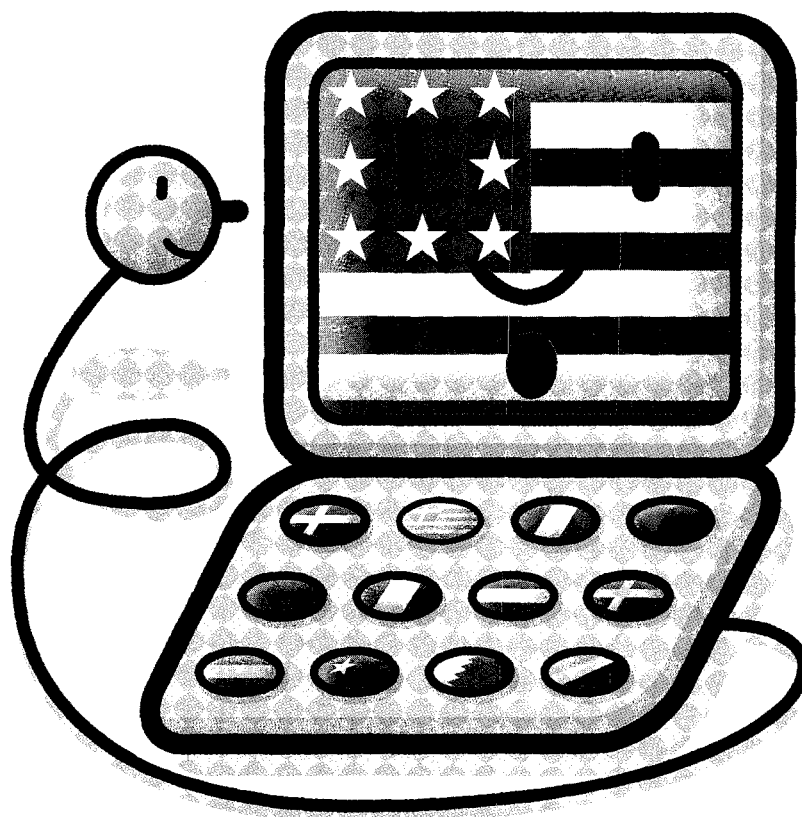
Something else obviously implied by the ascendance of English as a second and a foreign language is that more and more people who speak English speak another language at least as well, and probably better. India may have the third or fourth largest number of English-speakers in the world, but English is thought to be the mother tongue of much less than one percent of the population. This is bound to affect the way the language is used locally. Browsing some English-language Web sites from India recently, I seldom had trouble understanding what was meant. I did, however, time and again come across unfamiliar words borrowed from Hindi or another indigenous Indian language. On the site called India World the buttons that a user could click on to call up various types of information were labeled "*samachar*: Personalised News," "*dhan*: Investing in India," "*khoj*: Search India," "*khel*: Indian Cricket," and so forth. When I turned to the *Afternoon Despatch & Courier* of Bombay (some of whose residents call it Mumbai) and called up a gossipy piece about the romantic prospects of the son of Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi, I read, "Sources disclose that before Rahul Gandhi left for London, some kind of a 'swayamvar' was enacted at 10, Janpath with family friend Captain Satish Sharma drawing up a short list of suitable brides from affluent, well-known connected families of Uttar Pradesh."

Of course, English is renowned for its ability to absorb elements from other languages. As ever more local and national communities use English, though, they will pull language in ever more directions. Few in the world will care to look as far afield as the United States or Britain for their standards of proper English. After all, we long ago gave up looking to England—as did Indians and also Canadians, South Africans, Australians, and New Zealanders, among others. Today each of these national groups is proud to have its own idioms, and dictionaries to define them.

Most of the world's English-speaking communities can still understand one another well—though not, perhaps, perfectly. As Anne Soukhanov, a word columnist for this magazine and the American editor of the *Encarta World English Dictionary*, explained in an article titled "The King's English It Ain't," published on the Internet last year, "Some English

words mean very different things, depending on your country. In South Asia, a *hotel* is a restaurant, but in Australia, a *hotel* is an establishment selling alcoholic beverages. In South Africa, a *robot* is a traffic light."

David Graddol told me about visiting China to consult on another English-curriculum project (one that had to do with teaching engineers in the steel industry) and finding a university that had chosen a Belgian company to develop lessons for it. When Graddol asked those in charge why they'd selected



Belgians, of all people, to teach them English, they explained they saw it as an advantage that the Belgians, like the Chinese, are not native speakers. The Belgians, they reasoned, would be likely to have a feel both for the intricacies of learning the language in adulthood and for using it to communicate with other non-native speakers.

But by now we have strayed far beyond the relationship between demographics and the use of English. Technology has much to teach us too.

The Web in My Own Language

WHEN the conversations I have with friends and acquaintances about the future of English veer immediately toward technology—especially the Internet—it's understandable. Much has been made of the Internet as an instrument for circulating English around the globe. According to one estimate that has been widely repeated over the

past few years, 80 percent of what's available on the Internet is in English. Some observers, however, have recently been warning that this may have been the high-water mark. It's not that English-speakers are logging off—*au contraire*—but that other people are increasingly logging on, to search out or create content in their own languages. As the newsletter that The English Company prepared for the British Council asserted in September of 1998, "Non English speakers are the fastest growing group of new Internet users." The consensus among those who study these things is that Internet traffic in languages other than English will outstrip English-language traffic within the next few years.

There's no reason this should surprise us—particularly if we recall that there are about 372 million people in the world whose native language is English and about 5,700 million

The Internet is capable of helping immigrants everywhere to remain proficient in their first language and also to stay current with what is going on back home. Residents in the Basque communities of Nevada and émigrés from the Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, can browse the periodicals, and even listen to the radio stations, of their homelands—much as American expatriates anywhere with an Internet connection can check the Web sites for CNN, ABC, MSNBC, and their hometown papers and radio stations.

No matter how much English-language material there is on the Web, then, or even how much more English material there is than material in other languages, it is naive to assume that home computers around the world will, in effect, become the work stations of a vast English language lab. People *could* use their computers that way—just as we English-speaking Americans could enlist our computers to help us learn Italian, Korean, or Yoruba. But, the glories of learning for its own sake aside, why would we want to do that? Aren't we delighted to be able to gather information, shop, do business, and be entertained in our own language? Why wouldn't others feel the same way? Consider, too, that many people regard high technology as something very much like a new language.

Surely it's enough for a person to try to keep his or her hardware and software more or less up-to-date and running smoothly without simultaneously having to grapple with instructions or content in an actual foreign language.

Studies of global satellite television—a realm that is several years more mature than the Internet—also point to the idea that most people like new technology better when it speaks their own language. As Richard Parker wrote in *Mixed Signals*,

Satellites can deliver programming and advertising instantaneously and simultaneously across the more than two dozen languages spoken in Western Europe, but the viewers—as repeated market research shows—want their television delivered in local tongues. Contrary to a history in which both motion pictures and early television broadcasts relied heavily on dubbing of foreign (often U.S.) programming, an affluent and culturally confident Europe now appears to be more linguistically divided than ever before.

Parker distinguishes between the "technologically feasible supply" of foreign programming and the "economically viable demand" for it, warning that we should be careful not to confuse the two. A few years ago, for example, Sweden aired a "reality-based" TV series, *Expedition: Robinson* (the word *expedition* has entered Swedish from English), and it quickly became a national obsession. But its success did not inspire American television networks to import the series; rather, they developed new shows, such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*.

MUCH IS MADE OF THE INTERNET AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CIRCULATING ENGLISH AROUND THE GLOBE. BUT INTERNET TRAFFIC IN OTHER LANGUAGES WILL SOON OUTSTRIP ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRAFFIC.

people whose native language is something else. According to the same newsletter, a recent study by Euro Marketing Associates estimated that

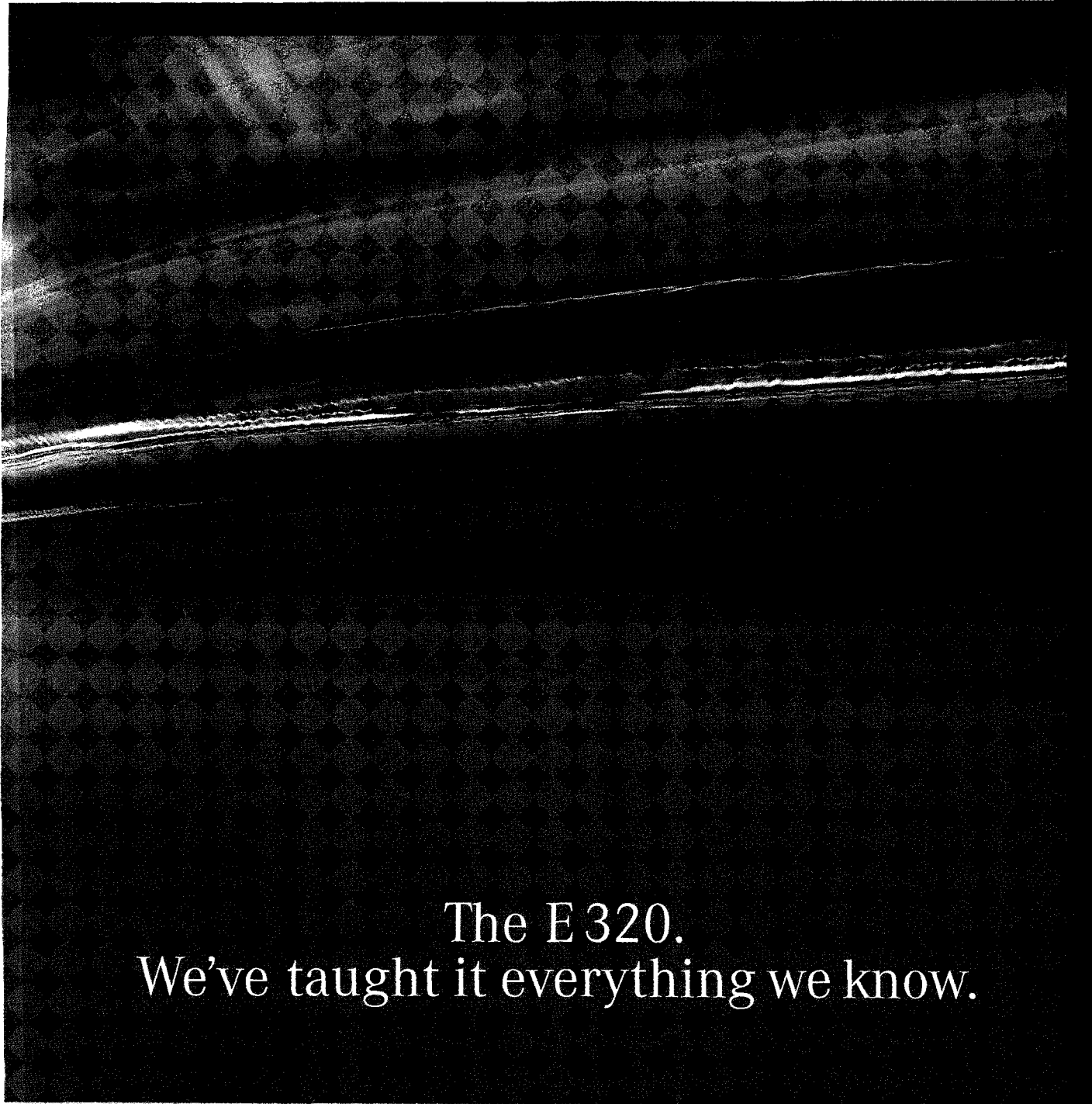
nearly 44% of the world's online population now speak a language other than English at home. Although many of these Internet users are bilingual and speak English in the workplace, Euro Marketing suggest that advertisers of non-business products will more easily reach this group by using their home language. Of the 56 million people who speak languages on the Internet other than English, Spanish speakers represent nearly a quarter.

The study also estimated that 13.1 percent of all Internet users speak an Asian language at home—Japanese, for the most part. A surge in Internet use like the one that began in the United States half a dozen or so years ago is now under way in a number of other populous and relatively well-off places.

As has been widely noted, the Internet, besides being a convenient vehicle for reaching mass audiences such as, say, the citizenry of Japan or Argentina, is also well suited to bringing together the members of small groups—for example, middle-class French-speaking sub-Saharan Africans. Or a group might be those who speak a less common language: the numbers of Dutch-speakers and Finnish-speakers on the Internet are sharply up.



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English by Accident

AT one point in my conversation with David Graddol, he made a little sketch of something for me on a proof of his article "The Decline of the Native Speaker." The sketch was meant to remind me that technology has begun to blur the distinctions between languages in intriguing ways—and to suggest how those ways are themselves starting to overlap. Both the Internet and a range of technological applications only distantly related to it, he wanted me to see, are poised to expand what we are able to do with English.

Graddol uncapped his pen and drew a box in the broad white top margin of the page. "Text to text MT," he wrote in the box, and he said, "Of course you know about machine-translation systems," tapping the box to indicate that it was to represent them. Yes, I did: in fact, *The Atlantic* published an article about machine translation not long ago (see "Lost in Translation," by Stephen Budiansky, in the December, 1998, issue).

As the article explained, there are translation programs—AltaVista's Babel Fish among them—available for use free on the Internet. Type some English into the appropriate space on the Babel Fish Web page, or cut and paste it from another source, and choose your "destination" language—French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, or German. Presto! Up will pop a not entirely accurate translation of your chosen text. Or you can do this in reverse, from one of those languages—or Russian (the English-to-Russian feature is still in the works)—into English. Some professional translators use machine-translation systems as time-savers, getting the things to hack out rough texts they can then refine.

To the left of his machine-translation box Graddol drew a second box, which he labeled "Speech to text." He tapped it and said, "And you know about the voice-recognition systems that turn spoken words into written words." Yes, those, too. As it happens, I am the proud owner of a Dragon Systems program. Current versions of that and several other voice-recognition programs are reported to render speech into writing with 98 percent accuracy—not a rate that detail-oriented people are likely to find reassuring (getting two words wrong per hundred can add up), but certainly a rate that allows a user to get a point across.

Speech-to-text systems are now available for a variety of languages. Lernout & Hauspie, an industry leader that recently bought both Dragon Systems and Kurzweil Education Systems, sells products for turning British speech, as well as American, into writing, and also ones for German, Dutch, Spanish, French, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

Graddol drew a third box in the margin to the right, and labeled this box "Text to speech." He said, "And there are also machines that turn written words into spoken words." The Kurzweil reading machine, created to help the blind and visually impaired, and now capable of reading aloud in more than fifty languages, is the most advanced example in use. Simpler machines that turn computer code rather than text into speech

are of course commonplace by now. We sometimes hear them when we call 411 and ask for a phone number; we hear them when we're refilling a prescription over the phone and a synthesized voice confirms our prescription number and name; we hear them on airlines' flight-information phone lines. These machines may have a vocabulary as elementary as numbers, the days of the week, and "A.M." and "P.M." But they get the job done, and they hint at how more-complex systems might work.

Now Graddol drew lines from one box to the next. "People are starting to work on connecting all the parts," he said. "Once that happens, a lot of things will be possible."

I could, for example, speak into the microphone that came with my Dragon Systems program and have that program render what I've said in writing; instruct one of the translation programs to turn the text into French; and then use Lernout & Hauspie's French-language speech synthesizer to pronounce the computer's translation. This may strike some as a ponderous process, but surely it would be less complicated than acquiring a creditable French accent the old-fashioned way. Then, too, speech-to-writing and writing-to-speech programs may materialize on the Internet, much as the translation programs have done. In that case I will simply talk into the microphone, miraculous high-tech things will happen somewhere in the ether, and *voilà!* the computer at the restaurant L'Ami Louis, in Paris, will make my request for a reservation known to the staff, in exquisitely correct spoken or written French, and the maitre d', unwitting, will assign me a good table.

That's the theory, anyway. I have my doubts about how exquisite the actual results will be for quite some time. The interchanging of speech with writing, writing with speech, and English with other languages may, however, yield serviceable results very soon. According to a compilation of funny signs spotted around the world, published by the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a Paris dress shop once advertised "Dresses for street walking," and a notice in a hotel elevator in the same city advised, "Please leave your values at the front desk." If we can understand the intention of these signs—as of course we can—then surely we will be able to see beyond most of the peculiarities resulting from machines' involvement in language. David Graddol's neat little boxes glossed over myriad difficulties inherent in each step of linguistic interchangeability. But each of these steps is already being accomplished approximately, and implemented not just in experimental settings but in real life.

Even as software developers continue to adapt computers to our linguistic needs and wants, we are—God help us—adapting our own language to computers. For example, if I want to see the Amazon.com page about the psycholinguist Steven Pinker's book *Words and Rules* (1999), it's a complete waste of time to type into the search feature "Words and Rules, by Steven Pinker," correctly capitalized and punctuated. The computer and I will get exactly as much out of the exchange if I type "pinker rules." In effect, in this context "pinker rules" is better English than "Words and Rules, by Steven Pinker."



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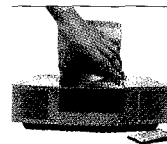
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Where computers' processing ability and our intelligence will eventually converge is anyone's guess. As we teach ourselves, for instance, to speak in a way that will make our voice-recognition systems as productive as possible, developers are tweaking the new versions of them so that if the system misinterprets a word and we need to revise what it writes, the change will be incorporated into its database and it will never make the same mistake again.

Does this matter to the future of English? It may well. What is English, anyway? Is it the list of words and their meanings that a dictionary provides, together with all the rules about how to combine the words into sentences and paragraphs? Much more is involved than that. English is a system of communication, and highly germane to it is what or who speakers of English care to communicate with, and about what. The more we need to use English to communicate with machines—or with people whose fluency is limited or whose understanding of English does not coincide with ours—the more simplified the language will need to be.

And yet technology is expanding English, by requiring us to come up with new words to describe all the possibilities it offers. Throughout the past century, according to *Twentieth Century Words* (1999), by John Ayto, technological domains—at first the likes of cars and aviation and radio, and eventually nuclear power, space, computers, and the Internet—were among the leading “lexical growth-areas.” What's new of late isn't only words: we have whole new ways of combining the elements of written language. One ready example is emoticons (such as >:) and ;-o), which seem to have firmly established themselves in the realm of e-mail. Is *www* a word? Does one write the expression *dot com* or *.com* or what? And then there's professional jargon. In the course of exchanging ideas, global communities of astrophysicists, cardiologists, chip designers, food scientists, and systems analysts are stuffing the English language full of jargon. As science and technology grow increasingly multifarious and specialized, the jargon necessarily grows increasingly recondite: in the journal *Neurology*, for example, article titles like “Homogeneous phenotype of the gypsy limb-girdle MD with the γ sarcoglycan C283Y mutation” are run-of-the-mill. The range of English continues to expand further and further beyond any single person's ability to understand it all.

One more fact worth keeping in mind is that the relationship between science or technology and English is, essentially, accidental. It is chiefly because the United States has long been in the vanguard of much scientific and technological research, of course, that English is so widely used in these fields. If the United States were for the most part French-speaking, surely French would be the language of science and technology; there is nothing inherent in English to tie it to these fields. And if something as earthshaking as the Internet had been developed in, say, Japan, perhaps English would not

now be dominant to the extent that it is. Future technology may well originate elsewhere. In the rapidly advancing field of wireless communications devices, for example, Scandinavia is already the acknowledged leader.

Here an argument is sometimes advanced that American culture furthers innovation, openness to new ideas, and so forth, and that our culture, whether by accident or not, is inseparable from the English language. But this takes us only so far. Even if the vanguards in all scientific and technological fields, everywhere in the world, used English in their work, once the fruits of their labor became known to ordinary people and began to matter to them, people would coin words in their local languages to describe these things. Theoretical physicists at international conferences may speak English among themselves, but most high school and college physics teachers use their native languages in class with their students. The Microsoft engineers who designed the Windows computer-operating system spoke English, and used English in what they created, but in the latest version, Windows Millennium, the words that users see on the screen are available in twenty-eight languages—and the spell-checker offers a choice of four varieties of English.

IN sum, the globalization of English does not mean that if we who speak only English just sit back and wait, we'll soon be able to exchange ideas with anyone who has anything to say. We can't count on having much more around the world than a very basic ability to communicate. Outside certain professional fields, if English-speaking Americans hope to exchange ideas with people in a nuanced way, we may be well advised to do as people elsewhere are doing: become bilingual. This is easier said than done. If learning a second language were so simple, no doubt many more of us would have picked up Spanish or Chinese by now. It is clear, though, that the young learn languages much more readily than adults. Surely, American children who are exposed to nothing but English would benefit from being taught other languages as well.

At the same time, English is flourishing, and people here and everywhere are eager to learn it to the extent that it is practical for them to do so. It would behoove us to make learning English as easy as possible, for both children and adults, in this country and abroad.

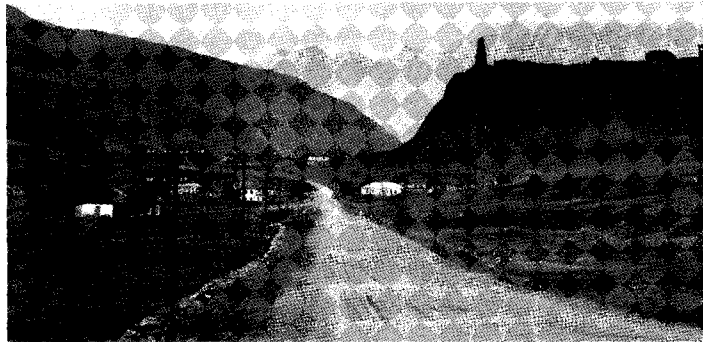
However unwelcome this news may be to some, not even headlong technological advances mean that computers will soon be doing all the hard work of coping with other languages for us. For the foreseeable future computers will be able to do no more than some of the relatively easy work. When it comes to subtle comprehension of our world and the other people in it, we are, as ever, on our own. ☘

See www.theatlantic.com/globalenglish for a conversation among David Graddol, Anne Soukhanov, and Barbara Wallraff, and a forum in which readers are invited to share stories about the local effects of the globalization of English.

Where Europe Vanishes

by ROBERT D. KAPLAN

Civilizations have collided in the Caucasus Mountains since the dawn of history, and the region's dozens of ethnic groups have been noted for "obstinacy and ferocity" since ancient times. Stalin was born in these mountains, and it was also here that the Soviet empire began to crumble. The story of the Republic of Georgia illustrates that the peoples of the Caucasus may prove as incapable of self-rule as they were resistant to rule by outsiders



ON MAY 17 OF LAST YEAR I completed a thousand-mile journey by train, bus, and taxi across Turkey from west to east, and crossed the border into the newly independent ex-Soviet Republic of Georgia. The first structure I saw was a customs building with a tall wire fence, guarded by a Russian soldier with a Communist hammer-and-sickle on his cap. Though Georgia is a sovereign nation, Russian soldiers controlled the frontier with Turkey, because of political pressure from Moscow. The soldier screamed at me and thrust a machine gun toward my stomach. He wore cheap sunglasses and was sucking a lollipop. He looked at my passport, found the Georgian visa, and marched me to a kiosk with mirrored glass. A slit opened in the kiosk, and I saw the bright-red hair of a Russian woman,

who examined my passport and stamped it. She directed me inside the building, into a steel cage, and several Russian soldiers, also with lollipops, examined my possessions. Then they opened the cage, and I walked toward another kiosk, this one without mirrored glass, where a group of friendly Georgians glanced casually at my passport and welcomed me to Georgia. They directed me to yet another caged enclosure, where a heavy-set Georgian woman gave me a customs form

to fill out. I lied on it, of course. Because there are no cash machines in the southern part of the former Soviet Union, I was carrying \$3,500 in \$20 bills in a pouch hidden under my trousers. Fearful of being robbed on the spot, I declared only \$400. The woman directed me to another booth, the last, where a group of Georgian security police—in tight shirts, with muscular forearms and calculating expressions—looked over my passport and customs declaration.

HULTON GETTY IMAGES

"Give me twenty dollars," one of them said, in a mixture of Georgian and broken English. I played dumb and shrugged. He smashed his forearm on the table and repeated the demand. I shrugged. We stared at each other for a few seconds, and then he let me through the gate.

I had entered Adjara, a small region of Georgia where a Georgian dialect is spoken and the population is mainly Muslim. Using religion to divide and conquer, Lenin created Adjara in July of 1921, splitting it off from the main body of Georgia and its Christian population. But such differences from central Georgia in language and religion have little to do with Adjara's current autonomy. Adjara is a fairly benign criminal warlordship run by one Aslan Abashidze, whose power over Aslanistan, as it is locally known, is made possible by the customs duties he extracts on legal and illegal goods entering by sea or over this land border with Turkey. People pay bribes to get jobs at the border posts, particularly at the port of Batumi, where they shake down others to earn back their investment and much more. It's like buying a taxi medalion and making the money back through fares.

Beyond the gate I met a gang of taxi drivers. One grabbed my arm and threw my duffel bag into his battered Lada. The Lada had a cracked windshield and roof, its doors lacked handles, dark stains were everywhere, and onions rolled back and forth on the floor beneath my creaking seat as the vehicle lurched over deep potholes. The car smelled of leaking oil and diesel fumes.

"Georgia beautiful, yes!" the driver exclaimed.

"Yes," I replied. Looking up at the mountains all around, I had to admit it was.

EUROPE and Asia fuse along the shores of the Black Sea, but the Caspian Sea is all Asiatic. Between these two bodies of water is a land bridge where Europe gradually vanishes amid a 750-mile chain of rugged mountains as high as 18,000 feet. This is the Caucasus—Russia's Wild West. Here Russian colonialists since the seventeenth century have tried unsuccessfully to subdue multitudes of unruly peoples. To the west and southwest of the Caucasus lie the Black Sea and the most undeveloped part of Turkey; southeast lie the mountains and tablelands of Iran; east, across the Caspian Sea, are the desert wastes of Central Asia; and north lies Russia, shattered like much of the Caucasus by poverty and chaos following

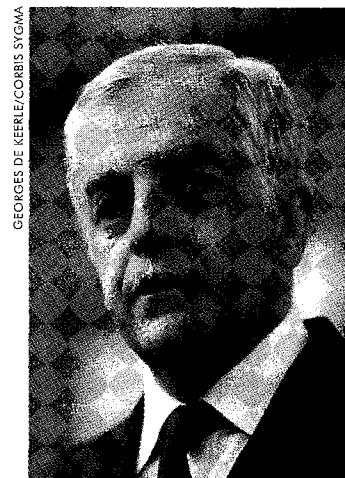
seven decades of communism. The northern slopes of these mountains, properly called the North Caucasus, contain various ethnic chieftaincies that are now part of the Russian Federation; the region to the south of the highest ridges is called the Transcaucasus—the land of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The Balkans border Central Europe. The Caucasus has no such luck.

Even before it did in Mesopotamia, civilization may have taken hold in the Caucasus, where there is an abundance of both water and vegetation, allowing for domesticable animals and agriculture. The mountainous terrain shelters miniature tribal worlds lost in time. The Greek geographer Strabo (64 B.C.—A.D. 23) noted that in the Greek Black Sea port of Dioscurias, now in the northwestern-Georgia region of Abkhazia, seventy tribes gathered to trade. "All speak different languages," he wrote, "because . . . by reason of their obstinacy and ferocity, they live in scattered groups and without intercourse with one another." It was on Mount Caucasus, in Georgia, that Prometheus, punished by Zeus, was chained to a rock so that an eagle could continually peck at his liver. Prometheus, who created man out of clay, represents the pre-Olympian authority that Zeus toppled; the very antiquity of the Prometheus story, which is part of the creation myth of the Greek world, could be further evidence that the Caucasus was a cradle of civilization. One theory holds that the word "Georgia" comes from the Greek word *geo* ("earth"), because the ancient Greeks who first came to Georgia were struck by the many people working the land.

Today the Caucasus is shared by four countries and about a dozen autonomous regions with as many as fifty ethnic groups among them, each with its own language or dialect. Some are well known and numerous, such as the Georgians, the Armenians, the Azeri Turks of Azerbaijan, and the Chechens. Others are smaller and obscure, such as the Ingush, the Ossetes, the Avars, the Abkhaz, the Balkars, the Kalmyks, the Mingrelians, and the Meskhetian Turks.

In 1991 the collapse of the Soviet Union, to which all of the Caucasus had belonged, set off a gruesome pageant of warfare, anarchy, and ethnic cleansing that engulfed the region for years and simmers still, with 100,000 dead and one and a quarter million refugees. No other region of the Soviet Union equaled the Caucasus in demonstrating how bloody and messy the death of an empire can be.

In the 1990s the American media and intellectual community embraced the causes of the Bosnian Muslims and the Kosovar Albanians, but they virtually ignored similar in-



Zviad Gamsakhurdia

EVEN BEFORE IT DID IN MESOPOTAMIA, CIVILIZATION MAY HAVE TAKEN HOLD IN THE CAUCASUS, WHERE THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF BOTH WATER AND VEGETATION, ALLOWING FOR DOMESTICABLE ANIMALS AND AGRICULTURE. THE MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN SHELTERS MINIATURE TRIBAL WORLDS LOST IN TIME.



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stances of ethnic cleansing in the Caucasian regions of Abkhazia, Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. And even as the problems of sub-Saharan Africa have become known through sympathetic international media coverage, the infinitely complex and intractable Caucasus has truly tested the limits of Western knowledge of the world.

MY taxi headed for Batumi, the "capital" of Adjara. The pinnacles of the Caucasus, capped with bluish snow, towered above corrugated-tin huts and citrus orchards. Cattle reaching for eucalyptus leaves stood beside the road. Hideous apartment buildings of unfinished cinder block, splattered mortar, and makeshift iron balconies—built in the Khrushchev era, in a style

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DIMA CHIKVAIDZE/REUTERS



In South Ossetia, a frame from the "gruesome pageant" of the Caucasus

prevalent throughout the former Soviet Union—announced the city. They were followed by a succession of examples of Russian provincial architecture: peeling white buildings, like rotting wedding cakes, in Baroque, Empire, and neoclassical styles, with lead roofs and wrought-iron gates and balconies filled with flowers, on wide, leafy streets distinguished by palms, cedars, cypresses, and fruit trees. Women on the streets wore short skirts and poorly made copies of European designs. Some

carried umbrellas in the rain and walked like dancers. Russians and Georgians all had wondrously sculpted faces. Here in the site of the Greek Colchis—a near-mythical domain of wealth and sorcery—I had found a dilapidated and captivating Belle Epoque.

Batumi, a city of 137,000 named for the nearby Bat River, is strategically situated on the Black Sea where Anatolia meets the Caucasus. An ancient Roman, Byzantine, and Persian port, Batumi changed hands several times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

turies. Russia captured Batumi from the Ottoman Empire during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. The Turks, taking advantage of chaos that was even greater in Russia than in Turkey toward the end of World War I, recaptured it in 1918. After the armistice 15,000 British soldiers replaced the Turks. They were gone within two years, as the Bolsheviks consolidated their control over the Czar's empire. Then the border froze shut for decades, with Turkey on one side and the Soviet Union on the other. The histories of Turkey and Georgia may have been interwoven for millennia, but the difference for someone walking across the border is vast. A time change symbolizes the extent of the transition: I set my watch ahead not one but two hours on the Georgian side (a legacy of the Soviets, who, like the Chinese Communists, established their own time zones).

Yet a mingling of cultures was set to resume. Within a few months of my visit the Russian border guards were to be withdrawn, under a new treaty between Russia and Georgia, and a new road on the Turkish side of the border would increase links. If the Georgian government, in the capital of Tbilisi, got its way, all the border posts would eventually be run by private Western companies, so as to help eliminate corruption and thuggery. States throughout the former Soviet Union are so corrupt that for now the only way to bring honesty to—and earn public revenues from—their frontiers is to all but sell them off.

The taxi ride cost twenty Georgian lari or \$10, the dollar being well established in Georgia as an unofficial currency. The driver deposited me at the rear of the tenementlike In-tourist Hotel. The cavernous, unlit lobby was paneled in cheap

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Michael Shermer

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—*Scientific American*

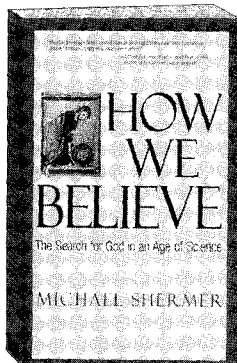
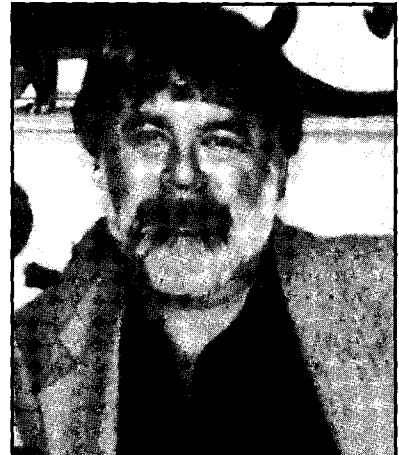
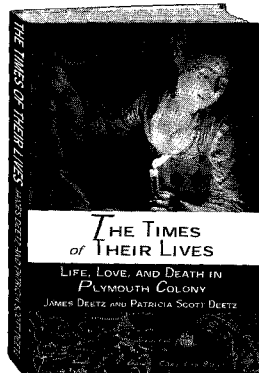


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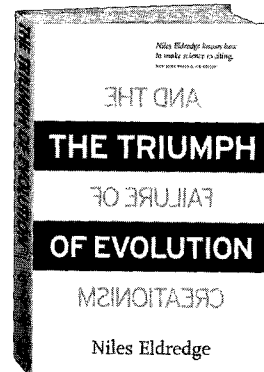
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plywood. An old woman in a smock was sweeping the floor. Another old woman sat at the reception desk. Her transistor radio was playing beautiful, weepy hymns that seemed like an intoxicating blend of Greek and Russian music. Across the hall in the half darkness was a video-game machine, and next to it a souvenir shop where another woman was writing in a ledger. One of the shop's cabinets held pocket knives, hard candies, and a book with diagrams of handguns. Another cabinet offered brassieres and ornamental daggers. A few days later in a store in Tbilisi I would see beach balls for sale alongside assault rifles.



I used the hotel phone to call Eka Khvedelidze, my translator, who appeared a short while later. "Don't stay here," she advised me. "There are rats in the rooms. Let's walk to the new private hotel." The private hotel had ugly furniture and dark-brown carpeting, but it was well lit and clean. The Russian blonde at the desk wore a fashionable black dress and smiled, unlike the ancient automatons at the Intourist.

After depositing my duffel bag, I walked around Batumi with Eka. There were barefoot children, garbage-strewn streets, cracked sidewalks, and potholes everywhere. And there were Audis, BMWs, and Mercedes-Benzes. The juxtaposition of luxury and scarcity was ever present. Shops where gilded mirrors and magnificent chandeliers hung sold nothing but bubble gum and ice cream; bars run by Russian women were decorated with shower curtains and old Christmas ornaments. The market area was well stocked with cans of paint and other goods from Turkey, and with imported whiskeys and perfumes. Unlike the convention-bound, drab towns of Turkey, with their grilled-meat stalls and men in dark woolen caps sipping tea, here I found a complete vacuum of tradition, as if everything—the interior decorating, the whole economy, in fact—had been improvised and might collapse tomorrow.

We went to the government offices to try to see the President. Aslan Abashidze had packed the local bureaucracy with his clan members. He is a small man with a large ego and a noble surname: his grandfather Mehmet played a significant role in brokering the agreement between Lenin and Atatürk

that settled the border here. He likes to receive visiting dignitaries on the new tennis courts that are the pride of his fiefdom. I sought an interview with him several times but was told that he was busy and I should wait another day. I never saw him. His offices were generically Communist: enormous white-marble hallways and dark-red carpets. At the front entrance, by a metal detector and a cheap little table, a group of tough-looking young Georgians lurked with mobile phones and sidearms. They rubbed their unshaven cheeks as they inspected my *Atlantic Monthly* business card. Outside the office was a militiaman, also unshaven, with broken shoes, buttons missing from his uniform, and one of those grandiose visored caps favored by the Soviet military. His breath stank, and he asked me for a cigarette. The official face of government here was uncivil, untamed. Batumi was tacky and crumbling, nostalgically European and mock-Mediterranean, with an exotic hint of Tartary.

Tribe and Clan

TO understand the Caucasus, a good place to start is with the region's most famous twentieth-century personage: Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili, better known as Stalin. According to a 1948 book by the Russia expert Bertram D. Wolfe, the difference between Aleksandr Kerensky, the enlightened social democrat who took power after the Russian Revolution; Vladimir Ilyich Lenin; and Joseph Stalin was the difference between the West, the semi-West, and the East. Kerensky and the Menshevik social reformers were extreme Westernizers; Lenin, a Russian from the Middle Volga region, was a "blend of Westernizer and Slavophile"; Stalin was a Georgian from the Caucasus Mountains. In April of 1941, when Stalin signed a nonaggression pact with Japan, freeing the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Foreign Minister, Yosuke Matsuoka, raised a glass to the treaty's success and, with hara-kiri in mind, declared that if the treaty were not kept, "I must give my life, for, you see, we are Asiatics." Stalin replied, "We are both Asiatics."

Of course, Stalin's despotism cannot be attributed solely to the culture and geography of his birthplace. Stalin's utter indifference to human suffering was a personal trait, not a cultural one. At the funeral of his first wife, Ekaterina Svanidze, Stalin told a friend, "She is dead and with her have died my last warm feelings for all human beings." But to say that the Oriental influence was merely incidental to Stalin's character is to ignore essentials. The monumental use of terror, the grandeur of his personality cult, and the use of prison labor for gigantic public-works projects echo the tyrannies of ancient Assyria and Mesopotamia. The liturgical nature of Stalin's diatribes, which became the standard for official Communist discourse, derived from the Eastern Orthodox Church, in one of whose Georgian seminaries Stalin studied as a youth.

Many of the methods Stalin employed, such as playing nationalities against one another until all were devastated, bore

the influence of his early life in the Caucasus. What ultimately differentiated Stalin from the rest of Lenin's inner circle—Leon Trotsky, Nikolay Bukharin, Grigory Zinoviev, and Lev Kamenev, all Jewish except for Bukharin, and all from European Russia and Ukraine—and what allowed him to destroy them all was that they were cosmopolitan idealists and Westernizers, however savage and cynical their methods. Stalin saw the world anthropologically. For him a Jew was a Jew, a Turk a Turk, a Chechen a Chechen, and so on. Such thinking was, and is, far more common in the Near East than in the West. In the Caucasus, tribe and clan, not formal institutions, have always been the key to politics.



Joseph Stalin as a young man

Georgia is a small country by American standards, with 5.5 million people, comparable in area to West Virginia. But it is the most sprawling and ethnically various state in the Caucasus, with a long, complex, and bloody history. Situated in the geographic and historical crucible where Russia meets the Turkic and Persian Near East, the mountain ranges of the Caucasus have allowed the Georgians to remain linguistically intact over the millennia. Though they make up only one one-thousandth of humanity, the Georgians created one of the world's fourteen alphabets. Its crescent-shaped symbols emerged around the fifth century B.C., possibly from Aramaic, the Semitic dialect spoken by Jesus. Saint Nino, a slave woman from Cappadocia, in central Anatolia, brought Christianity to

Georgia in A.D. 330, when she converted the Georgian Queen Nana after curing her of an illness. The Greek colonies around Batumi may have been converted as early as the first century, making the Christianity here among the world's oldest forms, combined as it was with the Greek pantheon, Iranian Zoroastrianism, and various Anatolian cults.

The Georgians were caught in that archetypal East-West conflict between the Persian and Greek empires that forms the subject of Herodotus' *Histories*. Later, in the early Christian centuries, Georgia became another East-West battleground, this time for the conflict between Persia and Rome. A pattern emerged that continues to this day: although Georgia was superficially influenced by the

West (Greece and Rome), its political culture became profoundly Eastern. The difference between Rome and Persia (and later between Byzantium and Persia) was the difference between semi-Western imperial officialdoms that were non-hereditary, and thus early prototypes of modern states, and a Persian society underpinned by tribal and clan relations. In Georgia it was the Persian clan system that proved more influential, and that system's remnants are visible today in the power of regional mafias and warlords. Despite the influence of European Russia in the nineteenth century, Georgia can be considered part of the Near East.

Another pattern that emerged in classical times and continues is Georgia's internal disunity. After a millennium of conflict, in 1555 Georgia was divided between an Ottoman Turkish sphere of influence in the west and a Safavid Iranian one in the east, while the mountains to the north cut it off from its fellow Orthodox Christian Russia. Iranian oppression was so extreme that in the early seventeenth century the population of Kakheti, in eastern Georgia, dropped by two thirds because of killings and deportations. In 1801 Czar Alexander I forcibly incorporated Georgia into the Russian Empire. What happened next was more dramatic than much of the preceding history taken together.

The czars quickly put Georgia on the road to modernity. Its population rose from 500,000 to 2.5 million in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were costs, however. The Geor-



BOTTOM: DINA CHIKVADE/REUTERS; ABOVE: CORBIS HISTORICAL

Among hard-line Communists, Stalin remains Georgia's favorite son

gian Church and nobility became subservient to Russian institutions, and Russian absolutism sparked peasant revolts.

The Armenians played the role in Georgia that the Jews did elsewhere: that of urban middleman shopkeepers and entrepreneurs. Under Russia's modernizing rule the division of labor between rural Georgians and urban Armenians was accentuated. At the beginning of the twentieth century Marxism became attractive to Georgians because it provided both an analysis of and a solution to their condition that were non-nationalist on the one hand and opposed to czarist officialdom and the Armenian bourgeoisie on the other. Georgia, not Europe or

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Russia, was the real historical birthplace of mass-movement socialism, with support not just from intellectuals and workers but from peasants, too.

Utopian rhetoric by local Marxists notwithstanding, the weakening of czarist rule at the start of the twentieth century led to ethnic conflict among Georgians, Armenians, and Azeri Turks—exactly what would recur in the late twentieth century, when despite universalist calls by dissident intellectuals for democracy and human rights, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to chaos and ethnic cleansing. And there is another frightening similarity. In 1918 a weakened and defeated Russia spawned three new states built on old ethnic

identities in the Transcaucasus: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. All were destroyed in the 1920s, as Russia reasserted itself under the Soviets. Were Russia to reassert itself again under a new autocracy, the West would have to prove as muscular here as in Bosnia and Kosovo to keep these states alive.

Georgia embraced Russia in 1801 because Russia offered an opening to Europe along with protection against Turkey and Iran. Had the czars and the Menshevik socialists, with all their flaws, been allowed to continue and evolve in power, the Caucasus today might be a model of civility. What nineteenth-century Georgian would have thought that the Turks and the Iranians, however fundamentalist, would prove less destructive than the Europeanized Russians?

Another lesson of this tragic story is that although history, culture, and geography are the only guides to the future, they are still not determinative—because of extraordinary individuals. Turkish influence would have been better for Georgia than Russian, because Atatürk took a backward Turkey and made it modern, while Lenin and Stalin took a directionless Russia and made it backward.

A Mafia War

I WAS walking in a park beside the Black Sea in Batumi with Eka, my translator, when a rainstorm forced us to take refuge in a café. It was a small place, with blank walls, an old and wheezing refrigerator, loud electronic music, and a group of men in tight black jeans, smoking and talking on mobile phones. We sat as far from the sound system's speakers as possible. To pass the time, I asked Eka about the first democratically elected President of post-Soviet Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

"The whole phenomenon with Gamsakhurdia was psycho-sexual," Eka began. "Zviad was like a rock star. You can almost see the psychological scars on the faces of his female followers: by their expressions you know that these women are ruined, as though they were his concubines. Most are single or have unhappy marriages. They expect Zviad to come back from the grave on a white horse—I'm not kidding."

This was the central narrative of Georgian politics in the years during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The region's leading Communist-era dissident—"the Havel of the Caucasus," as Gamsakhurdia was known—led Georgia into bloody chaos; the former secret-police chief and Communist Party boss of Soviet Georgia (and a former Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union) Eduard Shevardnadze brought Georgia out of that chaos and into a condition of semi-stable partial democracy. In Georgia an idealistic dissident all but destroyed his country, and a realistic old secret-police man rescued it. This happened not because dissidents are bad and secret-police men are good, or because realism is better than idealism, but because of Georgia's particular circumstances and because of the personalities of Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze. The story of Zviad Gamsakhurdia shows that Shakespeare is a better guide to politics than any political scientist. This is what happened, according to those I talked to in Batumi and later in Tbilisi:

Gamsakhurdia was the son of the great Georgian writer Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. In the 1970s the younger Gamsakhurdia, a lecturer in American literature at Tbilisi State University, led a protest movement against Soviet oppression that resulted in his imprisonment and exile. His dissent was a matter of radical nationalism, not moral opposition to communism; his nationalism was inspired by his literary sensibilities and the peasant surroundings of his native Mingrelia, in western Georgia. Then there were personal circumstances. He was the weak son of a famous and bullying father, so although he was a national hero, he lacked confidence. This vulnerability, combined with his good looks and literary reputation, made him attractive to women. His jealous wife, Manana, described by everyone I spoke to as a low-class, unattractive woman who dominated Zviad much as his father had, was enraged by this. Rarely has there been a political leader more susceptible to delusions of grandeur yet so easily manipulated.

Gamsakhurdia rose to power as the Soviet Union began to collapse, which was (popular memory in the West aside) be-

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At Supsa, in Georgia, the terminus of the pipeline from Baku

fore the Berlin Wall fell, not as a consequence of its falling. It was in the Caucasus, not Eastern Europe, that anti-Soviet protests got started in unstoppable earnest. The protests that rocked Eastern Europe in 1989 emphasized democratic freedoms; here they were purely nationalistic. In 1990 Gamsakhurdia defeated the Communists in parliamentary elections; the following year he was elected President. It soon developed that the Georgians had chosen Macbeth. Gamsakhurdia, relying increasingly on his wife, surrounded himself with bodyguards and vicious guard dogs. He imprisoned his erstwhile nationalist allies, and employed Georgian mafiosi for muscle. He showed a fondness for arson, as politics by other means. By late 1991, a few months after his election, Georgia was engulfed in a civil war that made internal travel impossible and ruined what existed of an economy.

In January of 1992 a military council ousted Gamsakhurdia, who fled to nearby Chechnya. Pitched battles followed in western Georgia between troops of the new military council and Gamsakhurdia's supporters, known as "Zviadists"—a term that suggests how little the civil war had to do with ideas and how much to do with personalities and regional loyalties. In fact the civil war was a battle as much between rival mafias for territory as for legitimate political control.

"Georgians were passionate against the Soviets and passionate against each other," Professor Levan Alexidze, a former adviser to Gamsakhurdia, later told me in Tbilisi. "Gamsakhurdia destroyed the Soviet spirit more than anyone, but in Georgia a civil war may have been necessary, because of the kind of people we are. The real cause of the war is our medievalness: our knights simply quarreled and fought each other." These knights were Gamsakhurdia; the Georgian National

Guard chief Tengiz Kitovani, who was described by one observer as "a vulgar thug"; and the commander of the Mkhedrioni ("Horsemen") paramilitaries, Jaba Ioseliani, a dapper professor and convicted bank robber who promised to blow out the brains of anyone who opposed him. Kitovani and Ioseliani were part of the military council that toppled Gamsakhurdia.

From his exile in Chechnya, Gamsakhurdia maintained links with Zviadist sympathizers in western Georgia. He also fell under the influence of the Chechen leader, Dzhokhar Dudayev—another volatile warlord, who in 1994 led Chechnya into a war with Russia that ended two years later with 40,000 dead, among them Dudayev himself. Eventually

the increasingly desperate Gamsakhurdia positioned himself alongside Georgia's historic rivals: Muslim Chechnya, Abashidze's Adjara, and even Abkhazia, where a Russian-backed separatist rebellion caused 10,000 deaths and the cleansing of more than 200,000 ethnic Georgians from Abkhaz territory. Because the main road out of Abkhazia into Georgia proper was blocked, half the refugees—Gamsakhurdia's own Georgians—had to detour through the mountains, where many died of starvation and exposure. This happened in 1993, when the West was preoccupied with Bosnia. And Abkhazia's was not the only separatist rebellion that brought about ethnic cleansing. Also in the early 1990s South Ossetians were cleansing their territory of thousands of ethnic Georgians.

Kitovani and Ioseliani invited Eduard Shevardnadze back to Georgia from Moscow to provide international legitimacy for their hydra-headed gangland regime. Shevardnadze accepted. Kitovani and Ioseliani came to regret their success: Shevardnadze played the two men and their associates off against one another until all were in jail. Then Shevardnadze brought reformers into government, while keeping enough gangsters in power to prevent the formation of a unified opposition. He consolidated power by trial and error and by surviving one assassination attempt after another.

At the end of 1993 Gamsakhurdia returned from Chechnya for a last stand. In late December of that year, at the age of fifty-four, he died, was killed by an assassin, or committed suicide. Two months after his burial his wife had his body exhumed for reburial in Chechnya. There was even a rumor that Gamsakhurdia had converted to the Islam of his Chechen allies, as he lost all sense of who he was.

Alexidze told me, "Our society is rotten, the mafiosi are

strong, and while the West worships laws, we worship power. We leaped from the darkness in the late 1980s. We did not have the kind of social and economic development Central Europe had. So these dissidents were never enlightened."

A Fertile, Majestic Land

IT was a mystical landscape I saw as we drove north in a taxi along the Black Sea coast from Batumi to Supsa, the terminal of a new oil pipeline from the Caspian. As a backdrop for the brutish ugliness of concrete tenements and filthy black freight cars were thickly forested hills, orchards, cedars and cypresses, and gentle tea bushes on the terraced red earth. There was a jungly, Africa-like stillness and torpor; farm animals wandered across the potholed road, and young men idled everywhere. Two roadblocks signaled the end of Adjara and the beginning of Georgia proper. The taxi pulled over to a cluster of young men blocking the road, in black jeans with unshaven faces and predatory expressions, like switchblades ready to snap. Some had tattoos. One seemed drunk; the muzzle of his AK-47 rested on his toe, the safety latch off. The distinction between security and thuggery was lost. We paid our small tribute and continued along.

The oil terminal did not look dramatic—just four circular storage tanks in the middle of a field with a nest of pipes emerging from the ground, an air-conditioned office, and a security fence. It was a little piece of the West in the middle of Georgia. The handful of expatriates who run the facility have their own electrical generator, purified drinking water, and living quarters. Though the soil for miles around the enclosure is, reportedly, environmentally ruined, Scott Bates, a friendly technician from Los Angeles wearing a construction helmet, assured me that alarms go off if more than ten parts per million of oil is detected in the groundwater. Bates showed me the twenty-two-inch-diameter green pipe that runs underground from Baku, in Azerbaijan, 515 miles to the east on the Caspian shore. The pipe was carrying the equivalent of 105,000 barrels

daily from the Caspian oil fields to a nearby offshore loading buoy, from which the first tanker to ship Caspian oil to the United States had left on May 16, 1999—the day before my visit. Bates took me to the small computer room. "Three to five of us are all it takes to operate the terminal at any one time," he told me. "You can do it all from that desktop." Strategy can be such an abstraction, I thought. That desktop computer and the twenty-two-inch pipe it controlled represented something the West might be willing to fight a major war over.

The journey eastward across Georgia from Batumi to Tbilisi took nearly seven hours in a crowded minibus that was filled with cigarette smoke and loud rap music. It was raining, and our shoes were muddy. We passed through lush farm fields, deep canyons, wooded valleys, and mountains half hidden in mist, and we crossed wide rivers that cut through gravel beds and soft red soil. How magnificent this fertile, majestic land must have appeared to the first Russian adventurers who had been plodding south across the monotonous Ukrainian steppe! It was easy to understand the tenacity with which Russia has attempted to retain the Caucasus.

As we neared Tbilisi, I began to see BMWs and other expensive cars, modern gas stations, cafés sporting new red-and-white umbrellas with Coca-Cola logos. I was gradually entering another outpost of the West. I left the minibus at a chaotic, noisy lot outside town and took a taxi to the home of Lawrence Scott Sheets, the Reuters bureau chief for the Caucasus. My first impression of Tbilisi that evening was of a Balkan town, historically suggestive and with a heart-rending rusticity. I saw leafy birch and horse-chestnut trees in a park where Cossacks slaughtered striking Georgian workers a century ago, near the theological institute where the young Stalin studied for the Orthodox priesthood.

Over a dinner of heavy food and rich wine in a small basement restaurant, Sheets, who covered every war in the Caucasus in the 1990s, told me that during the past winter there had been only four hours of electricity a day. To keep from freezing he had kept a fire going constantly. I later learned that the electricity shortages were, of course, the result of corruption and dirty politics. Local distributors had been selling electric power to Turkey in return for hard currency: in Georgia's barter economy the companies that repaired the electric grids received rights to sell the electricity to whomever they wanted. As if that weren't enough, kerosene suppliers were ru-

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Eduard Shevardnadze at an oil installation, 1999



Sacred space: Georgia's Sveti-Tskhoveli cathedral

more to be bribing the distributors to cut power so that the population would be more dependent on kerosene, and to block Armenia from selling its electric power here. So despite \$100 million in foreign aid, there was less electricity in the peaceful winter of 1998–1999 than there had been in the winter of 1994–1995, when the civil war was winding down. Corruption here was less a moral shortcoming than a survival mechanism for a poverty-stricken people who had been dominated for centuries by outsiders.

In Sheets's house the next morning I woke to the sound of opera coming from the conservatory across the street. Walking downhill to Tbilisi's main thoroughfare, Rustaveli Prospekt (named for Shota Rustaveli, a twelfth-century Georgian poet), I saw flower stalls, dark-haired women in black dresses, and verdant hills in the distance; the countryside is always close by, because of Tbilisi's medieval compactness. Rustaveli Prospekt was a late-nineteenth-century architectural confection with touches of Budapest, Ljubljana, and Prague. There was a Neo-Moorish opera house and city hall, an Italianate high school in happy pastel shades, a Neo-Baroque theater, another building in the Empire style, with caryatids, and another that was neoclassical and painted a fabulous pink. Statues of two nineteenth-century poets, Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, stood sentinel near two symbols of for-

mer Russian rule: the nineteenth-century viceroys' palace—a delicate Empire-style symbol of the bourgeois mentality that oversaw the emergence of modern European institutions—and, next to it, the vulgar gray-brown brutalism of the mid-twentieth-century Soviet parliament.

Tbilisi (from the Georgian *tbili*, meaning “warm,” a reference to the hot sulfur springs by the Kura River, which runs through town) was founded in A.D. 458, by the Georgian King Vakhtang Gorgasali. Byzantines, Arabs, Persians, Mongols, Seljuks, Ottomans, and North Caucasian tribes all destroyed or looted it; each time, Tbilisi was rebuilt. Though the city center around Rustaveli Prospekt looks European, in past epochs Tbilisi looked wholly Oriental. The architecture of the Old City tells the story: a Persian caravansary topped by Russian domes; Turkish baths; a Shi'ite mosque with dazzling faience like a transplant from Isfahan; the yellow-and-white Art Nouveau former Russian patriarchate, next to a quiet park lined with linden trees; and, towering above everything, the Persian fortress that King Vakhtang occupied in the mid fifth century. By the river stood the mustard-colored Sioni Cathedral, which I entered in time for the noon mass.

Named after Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, Sioni was founded sometime in the late sixth or early seventh century by a Georgian prince, and it has been often looted and destroyed. Inside, the women were covered by brown head shawls. Some had the faces of harem beauties in oil portraits. Herodotus suggested that every place touched by classical Greece was civilized, and here the ancient Greek style (not Saint Paul's Christianity) was responsible for Eastern Orthodoxy's sensual radiance.

Assyrian monks spread Christianity throughout Georgia after Saint Nino's fourth-century conversion of the royal family, and in Georgian churches one finds an eclectic mixture of Assyrian, Hittite, Persian, Greek, and other styles. In the eleventh-century cathedral of Sveti-tskhoveli (“The Life-Giving Column”), north of Tbilisi, amid dark rugs and lighted candelabra, were icons and frescoes of a savage Christ familiar to me from Serbian and Ethiopian Orthodox churches.

At the Samtavro Monastery, a few miles from Sveti-tskhoveli, a nun showed me where the Russians had covered all the Georgian frescoes with whitewash. The style of Russian Orthodoxy is imperial: whitewashed walls to highlight the accumulated icons, censers, and silver chandeliers. The Georgian church, with its primitive and austere frescoes, is a fighting peasants' church whose aim is sheer survival.

Fossil Nations

ON a narrow street in Tbilisi, I entered a dilapidated house with exposed mortar and peeling walls and an awful, eaten-away Soviet-era hallway. A door opened, and Zaal Kikodze, an archaeologist, invited me inside. Old books crammed every inch of wall space. Kikodze had a wiry ashen beard and wore a dark woolen work shirt. I asked him what Georgian history says about Georgia's future.

He said, "At the stage of technology we have reached, nations work only if they float in the larger world. And what you have in this part of the world is fossilized nations—dead societies that have yet to revive. There are a group of young reformers in our parliament, educated in the West. But today Georgians only want heroes. And we will never be able to rely on the United States or NATO. We are too far from Europe, too close to Russia. NATO will not drop bombs for ten weeks to save Georgians from ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia, the way it bombed to save Albanians in Kosovo. Yet we still look toward Europe."

AFTER RAIN

1.

You have to turn your back to the animals.

In theory it's better for them than shoes.

You have to hold them one leg at a time

pinched with your legs to pick clean beneath each
hoof the sawdust, straw, mud-pack, pebbles, dung.

The old ones stand patient, while the young may
stomp the hard barn floor to tell you to quit,
or nod their long necks or quiver or huff.

2.

Rain has turned them skittish, the rain-flung leaves,
whatever flies or crawls from a cold tree.

The scrape of your moon-crescent blade, as you
carve each hoof hard as plastic or soft wood
down to the white heart, makes them want to grow
wings, makes them want to fly or die or run.

You have to talk them down. Easy, you say
in your own wind, soothing, easy now, whoa.

3.

But it's the long, continuous sighing

breath of the file that stills them, for they know
you are through. You round the last edges down
and smooth the hard breaks, as one by one they trot
through the tack-room door, muscle, mane, shadow,
turning their backs to you. Now the sun is out.
Barn swallows brighten the loft. You watch them
break into flight, hoofprints trickling with rain.

—DAVID BAKER

Kikodze criticized the Soviet Union but defended Russia, which developed Tbilisi in the nineteenth century as the capital of Transcaucasia. "On this street where I have lived since 1958," he said, "there used to be Kurds, Armenians, Jews, Russians, and others. It was a golden age. We had no idea what nationalism was. Then it destroyed us. The Jews left for Israel, the Armenians for Armenia, the Russians for Russia, and so on. And the Russian language is barely being taught, which is a disaster for us. English is still only for a rarefied elite, while the loss of Russian cuts the average Georgian off from the outside world. All our books of learning, our encyclopedias on art, literature, history, science, are in Russian, not Georgian. Young Georgians can no longer communicate with Armenians and Ossetians. This illiteracy is promoting ethnic separation."

Americans, I thought, are triumphalist about the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is fine given the crimes of communism. But throughout the Caucasus and Central Asia I experienced firsthand how the Soviet collapse, although a blessing in the long run, has ruined millions of lives. Communism, however disastrous, provided pensions, schooling, social peace, and physical security for a multitude of people who had no recollection of anything better. The collapse of that system has left a chaotic void that so far has made life here much worse.

"GEOGIANS are a very old ethnic entity, but we have no experience of modern statehood," said Alexander Rondeli, the head of a research institute connected to the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "We are a quasi-state." Rondeli, the doyen of Georgian intellectuals, is fifty-seven but looks older. With a grave and sardonic voice, a large physique, striking white hair, and thick black eyebrows, he was like the voice of history itself. Rondeli's viewpoint was both wise and ironic, but also overburdened by the sheer accumulation of knowledge and events.

"Nations often get what they deserve," Rondeli told me with a slight smile when we met at his office, "so to see what kind of government Georgia will have in the future, it is merely a matter of dissecting our national character. We are nominally Christian, but we have never been fanatics. We know how to survive, but not how to improve. Our church is pagan, politicized, and thus unable to move forward."

"Remember," Rondeli went on, "we had seventy-four years of political-cultural-economic emasculation under the Soviet Union. Three generations of Georgians were spoiled. The West concentrates on the crimes of Hitler, but the Nazis ruled for only twelve years."

Rondeli was bursting with stories. Later that night we moved to a restaurant, where he talked for hours. "My mother's family, all educated people, graduates of German universities, were shot in the purges of 1937," he told me. "You see, Stalin would never have been promoted in a democratic society; he would have ended his life as a marginal criminal. In the 1930s, when Stalin arrived at the Tbilisi railway station for an official visit as the Emperor of Russia, it was the first time

in years that he saw his mother. You know what he jestingly asked her—‘Are you still a whore?’ People my father knew well were there. They heard it.”

Rondeli continued, “My father had a friend, a prominent actor, Spartak Bagashvili, whom Stalin invited once to the Kremlin. Spartak sat with Stalin late into the night, drinking and speaking in Georgian. Spartak wanted to leave, but Stalin wouldn’t let him. Finally he left. At the door Stalin said, ‘Come live with me here—I have no one to talk to.’ Stalin, Spartak said, was looking at him with the eyes of a child.”

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Rondeli’s voice and expression suddenly lost all trace of wit and irony; his manner was merely sad. “Let me tell you another story,” he said. “I knew this old Georgian who as a young boy had lived at a collective farm in the 1930s. There had been an election at the farm, and the man nominated to run the farm was not very good and everyone knew it, but of course no one said anything. But my friend spoke up from the back of the hall and remarked, ‘You know, this man is not qualified.’ There was some small rumbling, and an older fellow sitting nearby said gently, ‘Come with me, young lad.’ My friend went with the man. The man asked to see his identity card. The card showed that my friend was seventeen. The man changed the seven to an eight, because you couldn’t imprison someone under eighteen, according to the law.” Rondeli said the word sarcastically. “This older fellow was with the NKVD [secret police]. My friend spent the next ten years in a labor camp on Novaya Zemlya, an island in the Arctic, from the age of seventeen to twenty-seven.” Rondeli snapped his fingers. “Like that—ten years. That’s how those things happened.”

“Well, my friend was tough and he survived. His job was to drive the cart each evening that transported the bodies to the common grave. They weren’t always dead—nobody was careful about these things—but it didn’t matter, since the cold and the dirt would kill them soon enough. Anyway, one night my friend was driving his cart full of bodies, singing a tune in Georgian. Suddenly, amid the howls of the wind, he heard a voice faintly crying in Georgian, ‘Help me, help me.’ This startled my friend, because he hadn’t heard Georgian spoken in a long time. One of the bodies was still alive: an Armenian from Georgia, who, when he heard my friend singing, had called out for help. My friend took him out of the stockpile of bodies and managed to save him. Years later, after they were

both released, they met in Kutaisi, where the fellow insisted that my friend come to Batumi and meet his family. They spent days drinking and honoring my friend. Both my friend and this other fellow died a few years later, still relatively young. The years in the camps had done something to their health. You multiply this story by fourteen, twenty, or thirty million, you will have an idea what Stalin was able to accomplish.” Rondeli raised his thick eyebrows.

Like everyone else in Georgia, Rondeli was obsessed with Russia. Echoing the archaeologist Kikodze, he told me, “After Kosovo, the West will not intervene east of the Carpathians. Kosovo was a very expensive and lucky victory for NATO, so we in the Caucasus know that we are alone against the Kremlin.”

Along with the hatred of Russia went a dislike of Armenians. Listening to other Georgians talk about Armenians gave me the chilling sensation of what Old World anti-Semitism must have been like: Armenians are “usurers who ruined Georgian families, who are now allied with Russia against Georgia and Azerbaijan.” “The Armenians are always claiming that they are the best, that they are fighting with nothing, even while Russia supports them.” “I don’t like Armenians; the Azeris are nicer people.” “The only good-looking Armenian is Cher.”

YET in Tbilisi I felt hope. Whereas the economy had declined by double digits each year in the first half of the 1990s, since 1996 it had been rebounding by double digits. Traffic had doubled within a year. A city that in the mid-1990s had few cars now had traffic jams everywhere downtown. Art galleries had opened. New apartment buildings were rising near the parliament in an area that had been destroyed by the civil war. Tbilisi in the late 1990s seemed to me like Beirut in the early 1990s, when a rise in property values indicated that confidence had returned.

The intellectuals view these developments skeptically, because they know from history how Georgia has experienced one revival after another, only to be crushed by Turkey, Persia,



Shevardnadze’s car, bombed in 1998

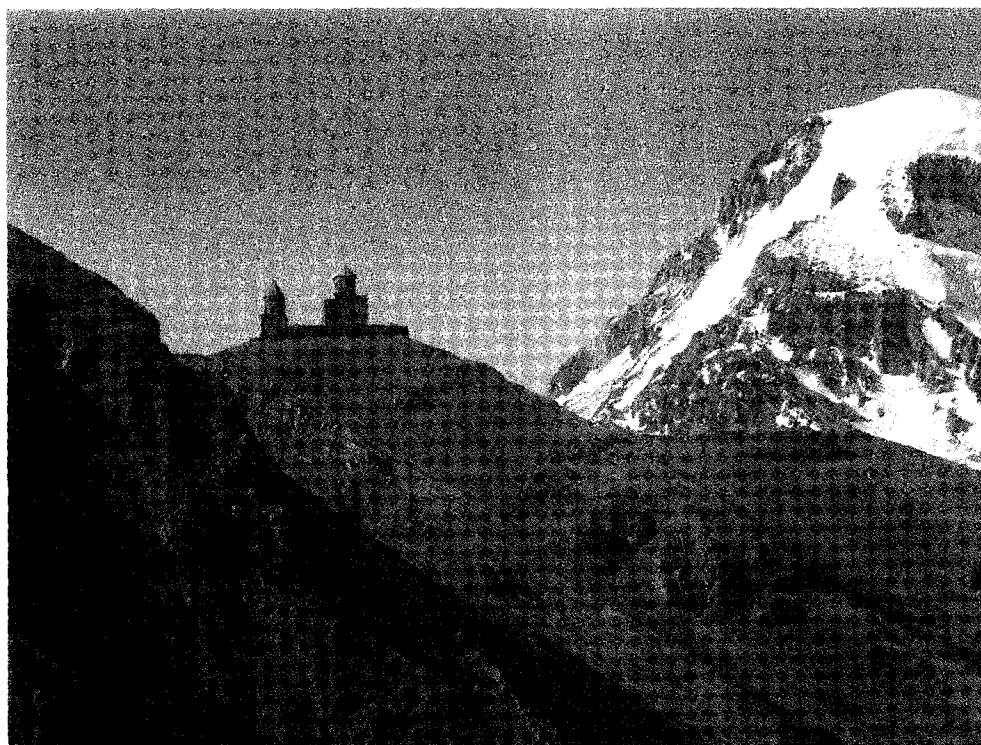
or Russia. Yet although history follows familiar patterns, precise repetitions are rare.

During my stay in Tbilisi it was announced that the latest in well over a dozen conspiracies against Shevardnadze had been uncovered. The next morning Shevardnadze called a press conference, where he calmly told the journalists that the latest plot was more than a planned assassination attempt against him—it involved a military coup “to remove the entire leadership,” including cabinet members and parliamentarians. Of the reported conspiracies at least two were full-fledged assassination attempts: a car bombing and a gun-and-grenade attack. I noticed that Shevardnadze wore a hearing aid: the car bomb had damaged his ear.

“The chieftain of this new plot is located abroad, in Russia,” Shevardnadze told us. This was predictable. With Georgia gradually stabilizing; with democracy, however tenuous and corrupt, beginning to take hold; and with the country becoming a strategic corridor for Western oil companies, killing Shevardnadze—who was tying Georgia more closely to the West—was the only game the Russians could still play here. For the Russians, Georgia, which served not only as a buffer state but also as a listening post for the Muslim world, was vital. No Western diplomats I met had any doubt that Russia was behind the assassination attempts.

Shevardnadze, seventy-two, is a burly man with curly white hair and a ruddy complexion. It was clear from how haggard he looked that helping to run the world as Soviet Foreign Minister had been a lot easier than running Georgia. His voice was deep and gruff but patient, as though he were conducting a fireside chat with us—twenty local reporters and me. Shevardnadze had a simple strategy: personal physical survival. A few more years without dying or being killed would mean time for more political stabilization, more reforms, more institution-building. At that point his personal survival, or that of his successor, might no longer be synonymous with the survival of the state itself.

Shevardnadze was careful not only to confront the Russians but also to make deals with them. He knowingly kept gangsters in power, and he had many lines of communication open to old friends in Moscow. George Washington fought the British by essentially running away from them, fighting skirmish-



Survivor: a church occupies the high ground, far from Tbilisi

es, until they got tired of the war and left. Shevardnadze's strategy is similar.

Morality is a funny thing, I realized. In the 1970s and early 1980s it seemed that Gamsakhurdia—an intellectual who had brought Shakespeare's wisdom to his native Georgia through his own translations—was a moral man, whereas Shevardnadze, a Communist hack, was an immoral one. But Shevardnadze, the Machiavellian, sniffed out the rot in the system he was a part of; he and his allies Mikhail Gorbachev and Alexander Yakovlev tried to reform that system for the sake of their own survival. They failed, and the Soviet Union collapsed. But Shevardnadze's survival game continued in Georgia.

How long can Shevardnadze survive against his enemies? The Kremlin has an imperial mentality; Washington does not. America's attitude is, to a significant extent, fatalistic: *It's their game, they've got to reform the tax system and the police, end corruption, and so on.* Of course, corruption is deeply rooted—perhaps the most corrosive ultimate consequence of communism. It will continue at high levels long after Shevardnadze's death. The West cannot hope that in a few years Georgian society will unlearn all the bad lessons of many decades, even centuries. “We'll be walking along the edge of a razor blade,” Revaz Adamia, a member of the parliament and the head of its defense committee, told me, “until enough oil is flowing through here to give the West the selfish interest it needs to fight for us. Russia will do everything to destabilize Georgia before that happens.” ☛

IN THE EVENT OF FLIGHT

by JEFF TIETZ

Days and nights with a bounty hunter

THE first time I met Tom Evangelista, he was sitting at his big desk, arguing over the phone with his son Sal's principal, waving a cigarette and occasionally blowing smoke out his nostrils. Evangelista is forty-three, which he looks. He has spacious, experienced eyes and a granular voice. He's not big, but there's something palpably unflinching about him. On his right forearm is a time-blurred tattoo: a black, undulant, many-lipped rose with the word EVAN beneath it. Evangelista was upset because the principal had lined up Sal and Sal's classmates and searched them for a stolen calculator. The calculator hadn't been recovered; there were no suspects. Evangelista said into the phone, "I'll tell you something: I find it very disturbing that anyone could just search my kid for a ten-dollar calculator. It would be like me going down the street and searching anyone remotely looks like a fugitive I'm after." He glanced at a copy of the pertinent state law—his lawyer had faxed it over—and grimaced. He listened to the principal for a while and then said, "Look, I'll come in and take his *drawers* off him for you—I'm his father. Just call me up. But you have *no legal right* to search my kid unless it's on suspicion of drugs or guns." He was strident but not disrespectful. When he felt he'd made his point, he thanked the principal and hung up. "Should have had him arrested," he said. "This is state law in New York. State law! I read it three times, I called my lawyer, I called the station house and asked if this was legal. You know what they said? They said, 'Nah, that's not legal—you want us to go arrest him?'"

It disturbs Evangelista when people break the contracts that just laws assume; it disturbs him when people break the covenant of mutual decency implicit in most human interaction. For a decade he has been engaged in tracing and capturing people who have become fugitives by jumping bail. He

has cleared around 1,500 cases. The bail bondsmen who hire him when their clients have fled, and other bounty hunters who know of his work, say that he has better instincts and a better case-capture ratio than anyone else they know. An NYPD detective Evangelista has collaborated with told me that Evangelista seems to have more skill than anyone else in the business. Three people have permanently escaped him: two to foreign countries (Jordan and El Salvador, which don't cooperate on extradition) and one by the grace of a Chinese millionaire, who paid off a \$15,000 bond in cash. Evangelista has never been hurt on the job and he's never had to hurt anyone. He attributes this to cautiousness and patience. He often knocks theatrically on wood; he's insured for \$5 million. He works mainly in New York City, New York State, and the neighboring states of Connecticut and New Jersey, but cases have taken him to Arizona and the Dominican Republic, and he says he will go anywhere in the world in pursuit of a fugitive if the bail is high enough and conditions are favorable to capture. Evangelista gets 10 percent of the bond amount for a surrendered fugitive; he has made as much as \$50,000 on a single capture. He'll turn down a promising case only if a sharp photograph of the fugitive is unobtainable.

I was referred to Evangelista by a bail bondsman I had called on a whim, not quite believing that bounty hunters existed outside of frontier myth. Evangelista agreed to talk to me; he was interested in dispelling the myth. His office is on Queens Boulevard in Kew Gardens, which is in central Queens, just north of Ozone Park and Howard Beach and JFK Airport. In this section of Kew Gardens the eight asphalt lanes of Queens Boulevard are generally crowded and brisk. Deep multi-story structures—the dialysis unit of Jamaica Hospital Medical Center, the Queens County Civil Courthouse, Doshi Diagnostic Imaging Services, the monolithic Queens House of Detention—over-





hang the street; the scattered storefront awnings belong to bail bondsmen and lawyers and salesmen of legal forms and body armor and engraved plaques recognizing the achievements of policemen. The curves and subdued rises of Queens Boulevard and the consecutive sides of its large buildings stunt the sight-lines up and down the street, which has qualities—a constancy of engine noise and traffic-displaced air and a tendency to suggest solemn processes unfolding inaccessibly in the buildings all around—that make a casual pedestrian lonely.

Evangelista works in a spare, gray-carpeted, externally unidentified suite in a 500-unit pale-brick apartment building. The first thing you notice in the waiting room is a big two-inch-thick Plexiglas shield with a circle of sound holes crudely drilled into it, through which all visitors are visually identified before being buzzed in. The waiting room has two chairs and a little table with magazines (*Life*, *Harper's Bazaar*) on it. Beyond the waiting room the suite holds a makeshift living room and four offices; one of the offices has a sofa bed with an especially heavy steel frame to which fugitives can be shackled. When Evangelista is forced to detain a fugitive overnight, the fugitive sleeps chained to the sofa bed while Evangelista sleeps on another sofa bed in the living room.

Task Force Fugitive Recovery Agency is the complex name of Evangelista's company. (Evangelista recently got his bondsman's license; he now simultaneously tracks fugitives and bails defendants out of jail.) The business is a family operation. Evangelista's wife, Florence, and his brother-in-law, Bob,

are its chief administrators. His nephew Chris works with him in the field. Sal, who is fifteen, and Evangelista's other son, Frankie, who is four, often loiter around the office, pestering him affectionately.

Evangelista sits at the biggest desk in the biggest office. In the desk is a copy of an essay his seventeen-year-old daughter, Dana, wrote about heroism when she was fourteen, in which she declared, "I will forever regard my father as my true hero." The words "You can Run but you can't hide" slide endlessly across the screen of Evangelista's computer when it's on but he isn't using it. In the distance behind the computer rises the granite face of the Queens House of Detention, with its many small, impenetrable windows.

CASES

THERE are perhaps 3,000 bounty hunters working in America today. They recover a majority of the people who jump bail each year. One bounty hunter recently became a specialist in locating deadbeat fathers. Another beguiled a fugitive with a phony certificate of presidential amnesty. A man from Arizona traveled to West Hollywood and posed as a rabbi to get an elderly mother to reveal the whereabouts of her son. A New York bounty hunter had a holding cell built into his motor home. A woman from New Jersey went to Atlanta, put on a hat and gloves, and attended a church service in order to handcuff a fugitive minister sweating at his pulpit.



Evangelista's cases are often strange and dicey. Once a fugitive hid by zipping himself into a portable plastic closet. Evangelista noted the minute respiratory expansion and contraction of the closet walls.

Evangelista's cases are often strange and dicey. He has told me of approaching a fugitive who lay in bed waiting for him, a high-gloss black wig listing on her head and a samurai sword under her pillow. He has watched a fugitive's children scurrying to bury their father beneath dirty laundry. Once a fugitive zipped himself into a portable plastic closet; Evangelista not-



ed the minute respiratory expansion and contraction of the closet walls. He has watched a fugitive fill his boat's cabin with propane rather than sign the boat title over to the bondsman Evangelista represented; Evangelista had given up arguing and called the cops and gone home when the explosion lit the dock and leveled the adjacent sailboats like a big hand (the fugitive was killed). Once he broke into the padlocked room of a professional car thief and found, amid tumbled pristine car-stereo equipment and scores of master-key rings, four steering columns mounted on heavy wooden blocks: practice sets. For two solid months two years ago about half the fugitives Evangelista caught declared they'd found Jesus and thanked him. Once Evangelista went into twenty crack houses looking for one guy. He has negotiated crack houses whose clustered booby traps included pits with glass-blade-embedded floors concealed beneath carpeting, and trip wires (of extremely fine fishing line) that released pit bulls or spring-loaded maces. In insular communities mobs sometimes try to kill bounty hunters; Evangelista once escaped a mob the police could barely contain. On several occasions, approaching the door of a staked-out house, he has felt the hollow, chilly tip of an undercover cop's service revolver against his neck.

Here are some of Evangelista's many investigative precepts. Scan cell-phone conversations just after someone has denied knowledge of a fugitive's whereabouts—the person will probably try to brief the fugitive. Never go after a guy as he's enter-

ing his house—let him go in and feel the peace of his sanctuary for a few minutes, and then knock on the door. Take a drug addict when he's in the deepest depths of sleep, usually around noon. Never forget what an excellent source of detailed personal information trash is—if a fugitive's addresses are stale or questionable, begin surveillance in the garbage. Be respectful and polite whenever possible, and do not abandon this manner when making threats involving financial or legal action. Page a fugitive (a high percentage depend on beepers) using a special tracing service called a trap line, which immediately yields the location of the phone used to return the page (the fugitive gets a generic message telling him the person he's calling is unavailable).

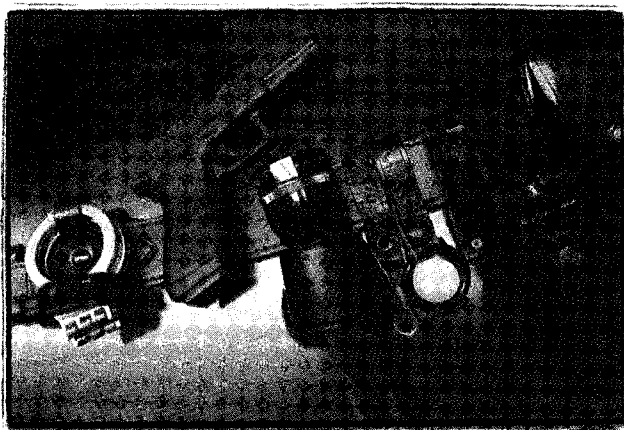
Also, avoid complicated confrontations like brawls and shoot-outs and car chases at all costs—if you can't isolate and surprise a fugitive, go home and try again another day. Remember that behavior tends to be repetitious, and concentrate on human connection—serious illness and significant holidays and pregnancy and sexual desire and the vulnerability of small children all draw fugitives to their families and friends and lovers. If a fugitive takes prescription drugs, search his last known residence for pill bottles, noting the pharmacy address and refill date (collaborating with the pharmacist, who can stall the fugitive by telling him his prescription won't be ready for a few hours, is always a possibility). If financial desperation may be distorting a fugitive's thinking, or if he might be particularly gullible, send him an advertisement-like card telling him he has won something, such as an expensive TV, and how to claim it. (The most famous episode of this kind of baiting, Evangelista says, was orchestrated by the U.S. Marshals Service, several years ago. The story goes like this: a high-level Mafia boss who had flipped agreed to pretend that his son was getting married. He sent invitations to fifty East Coast bosses and their families. The Marshals Service created a lush phony wedding, at which the bride and the priest and the best man were all marshals. The event unfolded lullingly, its true nature finally revealed in the reception hall by the best man, who toasted the groom and then asked the guests not to move, as the many patient, smoothly tailored marshals drew their guns.)

Evangelista knows almost by heart the bail-bond waiver provisions and the clause of the New York State Criminal Procedure Law and the texts of Supreme Court decisions and the two sections of Article IV of the United States Constitution which together generate the field of legal authority that encloses him when he goes out to work. Law-enforcement agencies often know little about the legalities of his profession;

when he's out on a case, he always carries the jurisdictionally relevant legal literature. In New York he takes section 530.80 of the Criminal Procedure Law (a procedural translation of constitutional law and Supreme Court precedent); everywhere else he takes local criminal-procedure laws and the Supreme Court decisions relating to bail recovery and Article IV of the Constitution, which obligates states to respect criminal charges brought in other states by surrendering fugitives. Evangelista's professional identification consists of a badge and a laminated excerpt of an 1872 Supreme Court ruling, *Taylor v. Taintor*, the first and last legal decision to fully enumerate his unique powers.

When bail is given, the [defendant] is regarded as delivered to the custody of his [bondsmen]. Their dominion is a continuance of the original imprisonment. Whenever they choose to do so, they may seize him and deliver him up in their discharge; and if that cannot be done at once, they may imprison him until it can be done. They may exercise their rights in person or by agent. They may pursue him into another State; may arrest him on the Sabbath; and, if necessary, may break and enter his house for that purpose. . . . It is said: "The [bondsmen] have their [defendants] on a string, and may pull the string whenever they please."

Evangelista often uses the phrase "by the book," but he rarely uses it figuratively. Cops frequently detain him, but none of their suspicions—of kidnapping, criminal imperson-



ation, assault, breaking and entering—has ever withstood his multiple legal references. "You got to know how to read and learn and comprehend the law," he told me. "If you can't do that, get out of this business. You're gonna get screwed, arrested, executed in the media." Evangelista treats the law with vehement devotion; he often quotes it like Scripture. He admires a bounty hunter named Lance Wilkinson, who took a wrongful-conviction case—he was accused of kidnapping a fugitive he had picked up out of state—to the Supreme Court of Massachusetts and won. "See, everybody eyed Wilkinson like a piece of shit," Evangelista told me, "but Wilkinson's in the law books now."

PURSUIT

I HAVE spent many hours in Evangelista's office listening to him talk about his profession. A majority of his sentences feature baroque constructions of foul language. Among the terms that ornament these constructions: "douchebag," "dickboy," "razorhead," "knucklehead," "meathead," "pumpkinhead," "penishead," "pimplehead," "fathead," and "potatohead." When he feels that someone has done something foolish, he refers to that person as Mr. or Mrs. Potatohead, as in "Mr. Potatohead over here gave me the wrong address." He frequently threatens his loitering children, which amuses them. Once I heard him say to Sal, "Keep doing that, I'll pop your head like a zit." Sal appeared not to hear him. Evangelista uses the adjective "frigging" to modify pretty much everything; in puzzling situations he frequently asks, "What the frig?" Another adjective he likes is "felonious." He is fond of observing that people are creatures of habit, and he likes to preface answers to serious questions with the phrase "to be quite honest." When someone is hassling him, he'll sometimes wonder why that person is breaking his shoes, or breaking his balls; when he admires someone's audacity, he'll say, "Pair of balls, right?"

In all the hours I've spent with Evangelista, I've never once seen him idle. I've never seen him pause to daydream. He has as much energy as anyone I've ever met. He works from twelve to eighteen hours a day, averaging around a hundred hours a week. Six years ago he took a vacation. Indelible dark crescents underscore his eyes. Evangelista smokes incessantly; he lives mainly on chicken-parmigiana hoagies that he orders from an Italian place down the street and eats at his desk.

Although he often thinks intently, Evangelista almost never appears thoughtful. Sometimes he seems preoccupied, but only in a horizontal, multiple-task kind of way, never in a vertical, self-analytical kind of way: he is either purely engaged in one or more aspects of his life or work or searching intensely for something to be purely engaged in. He is never frantic; his attention marches steadily from one engagement to the next, fastening on each with the same total commitment, and you never know quite what's guiding him, which tends to insulate him slightly from the people around him and cast them in a subsidiary light. Evangelista's conversational manner heightens this effect: his periodic avid quietness indicates a hard evaluation of confidential objectives; otherwise he's a torrential talker, difficult to interrupt and given to digression.

When he goes out looking for fugitives, Evangelista assembles three or four freelance employees in his office (they usually have heavy builds and daytime security jobs and recovery experience), gets his gear and weaponry together, says, "Let me kiss my wife good-bye, case I get bumped off," walks into Florence's office and kisses her, and then leads everyone out to his van. He wears a black shirt that says FUGITIVE RECOVERY AGENT in tall yellow letters, a bulletproof vest, and a utility belt holding a canister of pepper spray, a flashlight, hand-

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt



She's nine years old, poor, and failing school. Her problems began in 1958.

*S*he can't read. Her mother has never had a job interview. Her grandmother never graduated from high school. It's tough to succeed when failure is a family tradition. Like millions of children, she's on her way to becoming the one in the one out of five Americans who can't read well enough to understand a newspaper, a bedtime story, a job application. Poor literacy leads to poverty leads to poor literacy.



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People trapped in this cycle lack the skills to do the things most take for granted. Balancing a checkbook. Balancing a job and family life. Balancing all three. And sadly, it passes from one generation to the next.

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NATIONAL CENTER *for* FAMILY LITERACY

Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

cuffs, and an extension baton designed to strike joints and immobilize people without hurting them too badly. He normally carries a .45 caliber semi-automatic Auto-Ordnance Pit Bull pistol in a shoulder holster. Evangelista has never discharged his gun on the job; he has drawn it only a handful of times. He employs the FBI's use-of-force guidelines: subdue a fugitive first with your voice and hands, then with pepper spray, then with your baton. Firearms are defensive, to be used only if your life is in immediate danger and retreat is impossible.

When Evangelista climbs into his van, a 1979 Chevy C-20 with tinted windows and a carpeted ceiling and fake lamb's-wool seat covers, it's usually filled with food-associated trash, a shotgun wrapped in a blanket, and Frankie's car seat. The presence of the car seat always annoys Evangelista, who usually tells Chris to take it back up to the office or calls Bob on his cell phone to come down and get it.

The first few times I went out with Evangelista, we didn't catch anyone. The subjects of conversation in the van were women and past cases. ("Whatever happened to that Hindu guy with the busted leg we hooked up over in—where was it?—Jackson Heights?") Evangelista took calls from his family. Once, on the way to a housing project in Fort Apache, in the Bronx, Evangelista's cell phone rang. He picked it up, said, 'Oh, hey,' listened for a minute, and then said, "Yeah, no problem, I'll just stop at the local Entenmann's—oh, wait, where am I? I'm in the *Bronx*—there *are* no Entenmann's in the Bronx, Dana. What am I, Mr. Cake? Mr. Bake Sale? You want French crumb cake from me *now*?"

We generally went out at around eight in the evening with a collection of addresses and got home at around five the next morning. We didn't catch anyone because the fugitives had moved or consistently used a single phony address or else nobody was home, in which case we'd watch the house for a few hours. Evangelista had a manila folder for each fugitive; while we waited, he studied the contents of the folders obsessively, muttering to himself. When he knocked on doors and spoke with residents, he *did all the talking*, his men standing behind him in their bulletproof vests and emblazoned windbreakers, his manner credulous and deferential: he apologized for intruding as he dug through his folder, and the pendulum of his badge, a golden seven-pointed star dangling prominent and bright from his substantial neck, amplified the illusion of conventional law enforcement swing by swing.

One time, we were staking out a house in the North Bronx when a drunk came up to the van and began commentating. "You all do a good job," he said. "Cleaning up the streets. Fireman is my most respected profession, though. Go into a burn-

ing building just to save somebody. My worst occupation is doctor and lawyer." Evangelista treated him with canny gentleness: if the guy had known anything, he would have become a snitch. In a derelict apartment building in Flatbush we woke a woman at four in the morning; Evangelista had a bad address. The woman, a Jamaican with a bandanna on her head and high-arched, severely plucked eyebrows, got upset. Evangelista explained his work. He said, "Ma'am, these things happen. I apologize. I'm just doing my job. What can I do? You want me to dance? Look, I'll dance for you." He began a sort of slow-motion minstrel shuffle, head bowed, badge swaying. The woman shook her head and gave a rigid little smile.

Not long after I met him, Evangelista called to say he had just picked up a fugitive and was detaining him in his office for extradition to North Carolina; if I wanted to come interview him, I could. When I got there and asked him about the prisoner, he said, "This kid's a good kid. He ran, but that was a few years ago. Now he's got a girlfriend, he's got a kid, a good job. But this thing came along and bit him in the ass. He might be doing serious time. You might not want to mention that—he don't like to talk about it. But he's got weapons charges and criminal possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute—that's very serious charges down there."

The prisoner's name was Andre; he was twenty-three. Evangelista had shackled him to a desk in one of the smaller offices. Light chains ran from his cuffed hands to his cuffed legs. Andre was lean and had narrow eyes and a cursory goatee. He



spoke without inflection, in a penitent tone. I shook his hand and thanked him for talking to me, and he said it was all right, he believed strongly in God and was trying to make his peace with what had happened. Then he pointed to a pack of Newports on the desk and asked if I could light a cigarette for him.

Since he started tracking fugitives, Evangelista hasn't wanted to do anything else. He wishes he had started doing it earlier. He appreciates its antic strangeness and the adrenaline it produces.



Andre smoked his cigarette and told me that his charges were four years old and that he had completely changed since then, which he attributed to the influence of his daughter. He'd grown up in Brooklyn; after high school he'd gone with his girlfriend to North Carolina, where he had relatives. Soon he started selling crack. By the time he got arrested, increased competition had made his job especially dangerous, and his girlfriend, who was seven months pregnant with his daughter, had decided to return to Brooklyn. He followed her and left his case behind. Now he was a department-store manager; he was in his second semester at New York Tech; he'd just bought his girlfriend a \$2,000 engagement ring.

Evangelista's younger son, Frankie, wandered in. Frankie has a wiglike mass of hair and an unwavering, wide-awake stare. The intense fluorescent lighting in Evangelista's office made him look preternaturally bright-eyed. He walked up to Andre and said, "I like your shirt." Andre said, "I like *your* shirt. Mickey Mouse." Frankie said, "Cuff your hand?" Andre said, "Yep. What's that? You got a lollipop?" Frankie bowed his head bashfully and said, "Yeah." Andre said, "Where's mine?" Frankie ran away grinning and waving his wet lollipop, which glinted.

A few minutes later Evangelista poked his head in and asked Andre if he needed some food. Andre said Florence was making him a sandwich. Evangelista looked at me and said, "Hey, don't give him no candlelight!" and removed his head from

the doorframe. Andre laughed and said Evangelista was a good guy. Chris, who is thirty-five and wide and low to the ground and sort of manic, and has a shaved head and a broad, dynamic face, walked in. He said, "Look, we're good to him because he's a good guy. Now they're gonna send him back and be good to him. You know why? Because he got his life straightened out." Florence, who is tolerant and outspoken and has long, light hair, brought in Andre's food: a turkey-and-cheese sandwich and some potato chips and a Coke. Chris looked at Andre and said, "You tell them, 'I'm trying every day. I got a wife, a kid, a job. I was just a kid. And people change.' In a way it's good that you're getting this over with. You're trying to better yourself, and that's gonna count for something."

Andre was quiet for a moment, and then he said, "Yeah. I mean, I never forgot I had warrants. As soon as I seen Tom at my door, I knew what it was. But I was happy with my daughter and my girl, so I figured something must be right, and if the time comes, it comes. But my girl, she told me she and my daughter will be waiting for me when I get out, so that was the best thing I could hear. But she's a beautiful young woman. She just—even when we're out together . . . Put it this way: she could have anyone she wants. She's smart, she works at a bank—she don't have to ask nobody for nothing. About to graduate college. So I have to realize, if I lose her because of this, it's not her fault. She's a winner. She's the type of female—if a guy was smart, he'd take care of her *and* my daugh-

The antecedents of certain of Evangelista's beliefs about covenants and retribution are traceable to his family, which has always been big and multi-generational and close-living and feud-riddled.

ter. That's part of why I didn't turn myself in. Didn't want to lose her. I gambled and I—I guess I mostly won. I raised my daughter from one day to three years. She knows who I am. The roots got planted.”

STANDARDS

EVANGELISTA didn't really know what he wanted to do in life until after he left college—his parents couldn't afford to put him all the way through. He took a job in a department store spying on shoplifters from concealed perches. It was an entry-level position, but his instincts were uncommonly good. He relished the galvanizing stealth of the work, and identifying crooked employees—who had exploited access-granting contracts that left the stores vulnerable—satisfied him more than anything he'd ever done. From then on he sought work that offered comparable moral satisfactions. Within a few years of getting the department-store job, Evangelista had become the chain's regional security manager. He foiled employee credit-card scams. He orchestrated undercover buy-



bust operations at flea markets: when audits revealed discrepancies, he would rely on snitches to finger the thieves and identify the fences' markets; store security men would go buy the merchandise back with marked bills, setting the fences up for arrest. One Christmas, Evangelista broke up a half-million-dollar Cabbage Patch doll ring. Demand for the dolls was so high that the stores kept them in a padlocked storage room and required customers to pay first and give their receipts to a guard, who would retrieve the dolls. Still, one store was steadily leaking dolls. Evangelista staked it out and soon observed the manager standing on the roof lobbing scores of cartwheeling dolls into an idling produce truck with high slatted sides.

If he could have kept that job, Evangelista told me, he would have died a happy man, but after he'd been there ten years, the chain folded. He sold insurance for a while and eventually became an investigator for the insurance company, again pursuing crooked employees. One day he was wandering the Internet and came across a site called World's Most Wanted: Bail Jumpers and Fugitives—a list of identities and rewards posted by bondsmen. Evangelista tried to locate a New York fugitive using the personal-information databases he had access to as an insurance investigator; he found the fugitive, made some money, learned that he could legally capture and detain any bail jumper he located and thereby make a lot more money, and that was pretty much it: within the year he had quit his job.

Since he started tracking fugitives, Evangelista hasn't wanted to do anything else. He never gets tired of the work, and wishes he had started doing it earlier. He appreciates its antic strangeness and puzzles of concealment and the adrenaline it produces. He also experiences bounty hunting as a kind of moral tonic: it restores a necessary balance to society. Evangelista is partial to the symmetry of Old Testament morality.

The antecedents of certain of Evangelista's beliefs about covenants and retribution are traceable to his family, which has always been big and multi-generational and close-living and feud-riddled. He lives in a 3,500-square-foot house in Medford, on Long Island, with his wife, his kids, his mother, his nephew, and his brother-in-law. The feuds suggest rigorous notions of loyalty and betrayal: Evangelista has been estranged from his mother for several years, but he recently added a wing to his house for her private use; he is not on speaking terms with his sister, but it is her ex-husband, Bob, who lives and works with him.

All Evangelista's grandparents came to the United States from Palermo, Sicily's principal city—his father's parents in 1914, his mother's parents in 1916. Evangelista's paternal grandfather and great-uncles all carried guns. What they did in Sicily remains a mystery. When he was a kid, Evangelista would ask his great-uncle Vito, who had owned a few acres of olive trees in Sicily, why he carried a gun. Vito would say, "Before I came here, I used it to shoot the olives off the trees."

Evangelista's oldest son is named, according to Sicilian tradition, after Evangelista's grandfather, Salvatore. Evangelista described Salvatore to me this way: "He was five feet tall if that, but he was tough. He had hands like frigging anvils. And he always had a stiletto with him he brought from Italy. It was one of them pop-up jobs, real pearl handles, and he was good with it—he could turn around and shave your face before you knew what happened. He always drove a big Lincoln." One of

the stories Evangelista likes to tell about his grandfather: Salvatore worked as a crane operator at the Brooklyn naval yard until he turned seventy, when he retired and bought a hot-dog cart. One day a teenager snatched his change box. Salvatore chased him down, caught him, dragged him back to the cart, put one of the kid's hands on the cutting board, and stabbed it so hard with the hot-dog fork that the fork went through the kid's hand and pinned it there. Salvatore called the cops, thinking they'd take the kid to jail; instead they took Salvatore. When Evangelista's father bailed him out, Salvatore expressed his desire for a Remington rifle with a silencer. He said, "I'll shoot him in the head and nobody'll hear nothing."

Evangelista recounts the significant stories of his life as parables, scores of which adorn his speech. He employs them on a rotating basis and steadily broadens the canon with new episodes. When he discusses his negotiations with criminals, he often wields the following parables:

Once, while staking out a house, Evangelista was approached by a crack addict who offered to collect information for eight dollars. Evangelista warned the addict that if he took the money and didn't produce, it would be the worst eight dollars he ever made in his life. Evangelista said he understood that addiction made it hard to honor commitments. The addict told him not to worry and disappeared with the money. On subsequent trips to the house Evangelista searched the neighborhood until he found the addict among his associates, and then ostentatiously thanked him for his help with the case. After the second or third time, the addict began begging Evange-

lista to take the eight dollars back and stop destroying his street credibility. Evangelista refused. Eventually a dealer got suspicious and the addict ended up in the hospital.

Evangelista bailed a homeless kid out of jail and gave him a clerical job in his office. He warned the kid that staying straight was the condition of his generosity. The kid was a good worker, and everyone in the office grew attached to him, including Evangelista. Then one day the kid stole some jewelry and hocked it, and Evangelista found out about it and threw him against a wall and cuffed him and took him to the cops and told him never to come near him or his wife or kids again. For a few days the kid called sobbing from his jail cell, pleading for a second chance. Evangelista hung up every time without a word.

Evangelista told me that although he felt bad about doing these things, the feeling didn't last long and he hadn't hesitated to do them: they were necessary; they were just. He speaks of them as fixed and neutral events: in his experience they have hardly migrated from the past. Nothing seems to haunt him, which explains his frequent incongruous occupational kindnesses. He offers fugitives legal advice and referrals to treatment programs and attorneys. When fugitives have demonstrably reformed or missed court for a legitimate reason, Evangelista petitions their bondsmen to reinstate the bail. He is the only bondsman in the city who allows clients to pay the bond deposit in installments and who accepts cars as collateral. I have heard him say to Florence, "I can't keep a kid in jail just because his parents can't find the car title," and watched Florence roll her eyes. And he often hands cash to clients who have spent their last dollars on the bond deposit. Evangelista offers these kindnesses impetuously but generally as a contractual condition. If the condition (court attendance, repayment, respect) is violated, he imposes a measured concoction of penalties (recapture, repossession of property, permanent disassociation) and leaves the incident there in the past. His high-risk generosity remains undiminished.

Evangelista uses the following parable to illustrate the necessity of immaculate capture:

Recently he and Chris and a former employee, Joe, spent two months watching the house of a Nigerian counterfeiter. Evangelista had been tracking for the past year. Evangelista calls the counterfeiter Floyd, which is half of one of his aliases. According to NYPD detectives, Floyd, who is still at large, has a Ph.D. from Harvard. He recently helped design one of the largest bank-fraud scams in the history of New York City. Evangelista has never wanted anyone so badly. One day Floyd drove up in a gold Mazda Millenia, parked in the house's driveway, which abutted a busy street, and waited while a woman led five children into his car. Evangelista told me, "When I saw Floyd, the blood got to my head so quick if I'd have got out I probably would have torn his heart out. Chris and Joe are saying, 'Let's go! Let's go!' and I said, 'Shut the fuck up—you see all those kids? You see that traffic? We're not moving.' They didn't talk to me for like two days after that. But if it don't look good and it don't smell good, it's prob-

RAINBOW

Short storms make the best rainbows—
twenty minutes of inky wet, and then,
on the rinsed atmosphere's curved edge,
struck by the re-emergent sun
in impermanent and glorious coinage,
mint-fresh from infra-violet to ultra-red,
gigantic, ethereal, rooted in the sea
seen through it, dying a bell-buoy green,

it has appeared. And when it fades, today,
it leaves behind on the bay's flat glaze
a strange confetti of itself, bright dots
of pure, rekindled color, neon-clear.
What are we seeing? Lobster-pot markers,
speckling the brine with polychrome.

—JOHN UPDIKE

ably not going to turn out good. You got to control your emotions if you want to ordain your destiny. Now, I could turn around and start taking chances, or I could turn around and start letting bondsmen pay me just to go get their money back, repossess collateral, but to be quite honest, my opinion of that is, if you're gonna turn around and do that, what do they need you for? Any idiot can stick someone in the ass with a screw-driver; any idiot can squeeze a fugitive for cash. The reason for the bail is to keep them from running—you make sure they don't run, and if they run, you hook them up, professionally. Otherwise, what are you doing? Who are you?"

Evangelista worries about the future of his profession. In most states bounty hunting is unregulated, and he says he wouldn't trust 80 percent of the bounty hunters working today. In the past five years bounty hunters have broken into a vacationing family's Disneyland hotel room and accused the innocent mother, while holding a cocked gun to her temple, of being a fugitive prostitute. They have broken into the home of the wrong man and shot him in the hand, the leg, and the ear. And they have beaten a pregnant woman severely enough to precipitate a miscarriage.

Evangelista teaches a four-day bail-enforcement certification course that generally costs him money; he wants trained people on the street. He recently co-founded the United States Association of Bail Enforcement, which is dedicated to reforming the industry. USABE lobbies for legislation that would require criminal-background checks, certification, and licensing for all bail agents; it advocates the use of the synonymous terms "bail-enforcement agent" and "fugitive-recovery agent." A recent issue of USABE's newsletter, *National Enforcer*, carried an editorial by Evangelista under the heading "Message From the Vice-President."

On August 15th my office received a very disturbing e-mail concerning another incident involving "wanna be" bounty hunters. . . . It is obvious that these "wanna be" bounty hunters are untrained and do not know (or care) about the laws concerning the entering of third-party dwellings. . . . It is time that the trained professionals in this industry force the untrained "wanna be" bounty hunters out of business before the general public forces us all out!

CAPTURE

ABOUT the fifth time I went out with Evangelista, he caught someone—a Russian named Nikolai who was forty-two and had no family and spoke no English and worked at a car wash in Central Islip, on Long Island. Nikolai had entered the country illegally; the Immigration and Naturalization Service had caught him, heard his case, and denied him residence. He had been out on bond during the proceedings; when the INS ruled against him, he agreed to voluntary deportation. He bought his plane ticket to Russia and showed it to the INS and signed his deportation forms, but he didn't leave. He got a refund on the ticket and went back to work. He

was at work when I went with Evangelista and Chris and an employee of Evangelista's named Bobby to get him.

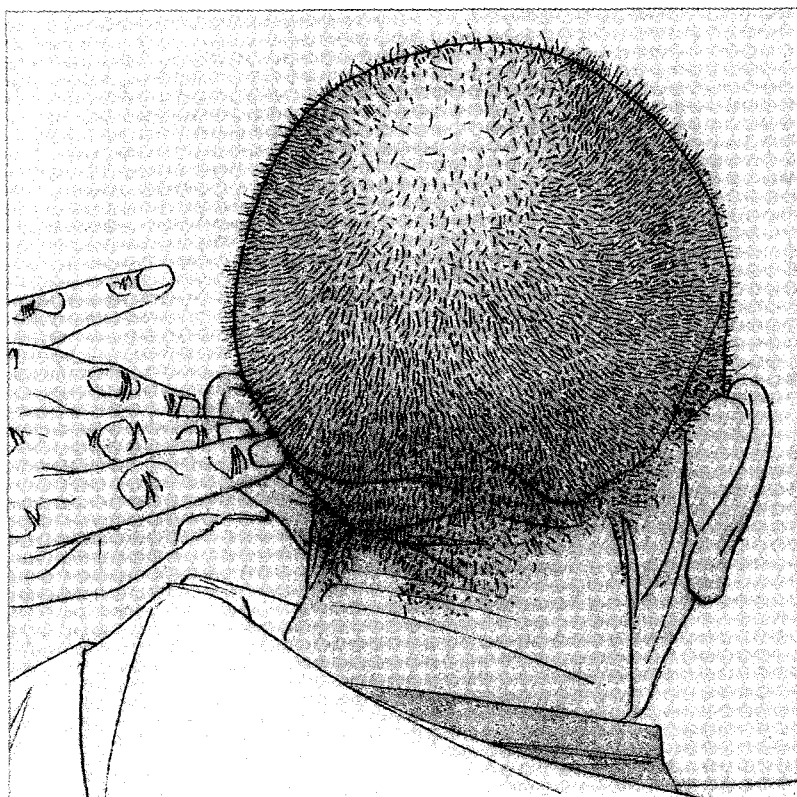
In the van Evangelista told me to unhook Frankie's car seat and throw it in the back. On the way to Long Island, Chris said, "Can we go through the car wash and then grab him? That'd be great. Hey, you missed a spot—now put these on." We went to an office on Long Island to meet Nikolai's ex-boss and bond guarantor, another Russian, who had agreed to accompany us to the car wash and get Nikolai into a conversation so that Evangelista and Chris and Bobby could rush him. The Russian looked apologetic. He wore a silk Versace shirt and thick gold jewelry—the gleams it threw off had a kind of fleeting weight. Evangelista asked him some questions about Nikolai's strength and temperament and instructed him to get Nikolai into the open. We followed the Russian, who was driving a customized late-model Range Rover, to the car wash. Evangelista said the Russian had recently sold the business; Evangelista thought he'd been bonding out other Russians held on immigration violations and employing them at the car wash, paying them starvation wages and charging them steep interest rates for the bond deposits he'd put up. The Russian drove erratically. Evangelista, beginning an old routine, said, "May the fleas of a thousand camels lay eggs on your face." Bobby—who had just completed Evangelista's training course and was the little brother of another of Evangelista's employees and had hardly said anything—said, "And may they hatch at the same time!"

Eventually the Russian pulled into the car-wash parking lot. We parked at the curb and watched. The Russian approached a van and began talking to the man in the driver's seat and then cast a few significant looks in our direction. Evangelista and Chris and Bobby, vested and belted, quickly surrounded the van. Evangelista slipped his hand through the window and slid the keys out of the ignition. For a while Nikolai didn't move. Then, with the intense deliberation of the resigned, he got out, unfolding his long limbs, and allowed himself to be cuffed. He wore old sandals and a red jumpsuit that said NU IMAGE CAR WASH AND DETAIL CENTER—WE KEEP IT CLEAN! He looked older than forty-two: his hair was whitening at the temples, and his face was scarred. Vacantly he clutched a soiled toothbrush he'd been using on a detailing job. Chris took it from him. Nikolai spoke infrequently and with little modulation to the Russian, who translated. His sole concern seemed to be making sure that his pants weren't left behind. Chris went inside and got them. Like Andre, Nikolai had chosen to allow his life to become a contingency; now he seemed simultaneously relieved and grateful and stunned and anguished.

Evangelista led Nikolai to the van and fastened his seat belt for him as if he were a child. Nikolai said almost nothing on the ride back to Queens. When he was addressed, he gave rueful, constricted smiles of incomprehension. For long stretches we forgot he was there and talked about whatever came into our heads. With the clean capture the broken bond contract had been repaired, and Nikolai, eyes now closing, head beginning to loll, had become a symbol of restored symmetry. ☸

Cello

by RÉMY ROUGEAU



Brother Antoine wanted to present a version of himself
that he thought the Tibetans would admire, and in the meantime his
scorn for all things Western grew

DOM Jacques Bouvray, the abbot, informed the entire community that very soon they would receive four Buddhist monks as visitors. Brother Antoine sat with the assembled Cistercian monks and scrutinized their expressions as the abbot spoke. Forty-six of his brothers were seated on benches opposite one another along the chapter-room walls, while the abbot sat on a raised throne at the end, under a crucifix.

"As you know," Dom Jacques said in French, "Benedictine and Cistercian monks and nuns have been given a Vatican

mandate to establish dialogue with monks of other religions. This is why we have invited the Buddhists. I am certain that if we are open-minded and hospitable, this exchange will be a singular learning experience for us."

Old Fathers Cyprien and Marie-Nizier were asleep, their heads shamelessly bowed to their chests. Antoine smiled as he observed how the other monks looked toward the abbot with open mouths and raised eyebrows. Excellent, he thought. The Buddhists will be good for them.

"We need a volunteer," the abbot said, "to look after details

of the visit,” and he peered out over his reading glasses. Antoine saw no hands. After an awkward moment the abbot spoke again.

“We need someone friendly and open-minded, someone interested in world religions.”

Still no hands. Antoine felt uncomfortable and nervously scratched at a spot on his scalp, behind the left ear.

“Thank you, Brother Antoine,” the abbot said. “You’re just the person for the job. I appoint you our official East-West Dialogue Contact Person.”

Antoine was caught by surprise, but in the days following, his job grew on him. At first it sounded ridiculous. How many Buddhist monks lived in Manitoba? East and West were a very long way from each other in some parts of the world. From where would these monks come? A Buddhist monastery in Asia?

Antoine read the stack of material given him by Dom Jacques and discovered that Dharmasala, India, was exactly where the visitors were coming from. Several Roman Catholic monasteries had combined efforts and shared expenses to bring Tibetan Buddhist monks to North America. Antoine also learned, from bulky correspondence, that several abbesses took issue with the arrangements. These women carefully explained that although in theory they were not opposed in any way to the visiting Tibetans, they could not put them up in their monasteries, because the visitors were men, and men were strictly excluded from the papal enclosure of women. Benedictine and Cistercian abbots responded by reminding the nuns that women were likewise forbidden from entering most areas of men’s abbeys—but such details, they said, should not inhibit hospitality. And in light of the fact that the Vatican had called for a cordial exchange, the nuns ought to find adequate sleeping quarters for the Tibetans outside the cloister, perhaps with friends. As long as the cloistered areas were respected, they said, with men remaining on one side and women on the other, the exchange could take place. In the end, the nuns withdrew from the arrangements. Nevertheless, six Canadian abbeys remained on the tour, and Brother Antoine’s was fourth on the list. The Tibetans would arrive from Quebec and travel on, after Winnipeg, to an abbey in Saskatchewan and another in British Columbia.

Many details of the tour had not yet been arranged, however, and Antoine wrote and received several letters, and even spoke on the telephone when necessary. At first he was shy, but quickly he became more forward, even officious, receiving calls from Quebec and India with the full approval of the abbot. He often had to leave work in the dairy barn to handle this or that pressing detail, making long-distance arrangements with monks he did not know.

Antoine became enthusiastic and soon found himself studying. Because he knew next to nothing about Buddhism, Dom Jacques allowed him to read any Buddhist-related book he could get his hands on. He ordered exotic tomes through interlibrary loan, and Brother François picked these up when he

went to Winnipeg for supplies. Antoine read about Zen monks in Japan who spent whole days in a folded position like the Buddha, impervious to disturbances. He was edified, and wondered why his Cistercian brothers could not do likewise. He noticed that they could not sit still for a moment, fussing and passing gas in choir during the most sacred moments of the liturgy. Antoine read of Tibetan monks who ate nothing for weeks at a time. This seemed inhuman. But surely, he thought, the intense discipline they practiced led to high levels of spiritual enlightenment. Otherwise, why would they bother? Cistercian monks grumbled if they were made to give up desserts for Lent. The more Antoine studied Buddhism, the less edified he was by his own brothers, and subconsciously he began to long for a better place to live. He imagined rows of motionless figures seated on the floor, solid and stonelike, their lips moving in a salubrious whisper of words. He wanted to be with *real* monks, who ate tiny portions of cooked rice and pickled vegetables, who slept on the floor, who remained for hours at a time in stationary meditation, unperturbed by one another, hardly noticing the world in their contemplation.

As Contact Person, Antoine learned that one of the Tibetan monks could speak both French and English. This was exciting news, and Antoine prepared himself to discuss religious matters by reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, none of which he understood. He repeatedly attempted to gain some insight, some small bearing on the subject of Buddhism, in a washing ambience of words, as he read books aloud in the pig barn. He tried several times to sit in the lotus position, but each time he forced his legs into a knitted arrangement in front of him, his feet went to sleep and he found walking difficult afterward. Nevertheless, Antoine eagerly kept after his preparation for the Tibetans, even though Contact Persons were advised to “be themselves” and to present the Buddhist monks with living Western monastic traditions.

Antoine asked himself, *What living Western monastic traditions?* After reading books about the great feats of Buddhist monks, he felt embarrassed by Western monasticism. He saw nothing extraordinary about his own abbey, and without realizing it he became even more anxious because of this low assessment. He corseted himself with Buddhist meditation practices as described in books by Western writers. He painted himself with a hodgepodge of Eastern attitudes that he lifted from footnotes. Antoine wanted to present a version of himself that he thought the Tibetans would admire, and in the meantime, his scorn for all things Western grew.

DEAR Brother,” Dom Jacques said to him one day, after he saw Antoine building a Tibetan prayer wheel, “the Buddhists are coming here to see Western monks. Take pride in yourself and in your own monastic heritage. Why be embarrassed by your abbey’s peculiarities? We will receive the Tibetans into our home under our terms.”

“But you don’t understand, *mon père abbé*,” Antoine an-

swered. "I don't want the Buddhists to think we are ignorant of their ways."

Secretly Antoine cut back on food. He hoped to become accustomed to less, so that if the Tibetans by chance noticed him in the refectory, they would be impressed by his nibbling on a piece of dry toast while his brothers shoveled oatmeal into their mouths. All Buddhists ate rice, he assumed, and rice was occasionally served at the abbey, though it was prepared in a slimy, gruel-like soup. Antoine took portions of this and passed on the cheese. Very often he had only a slice of bread. After a few weeks of his new diet he became anemic. He fainted in choir one day, and when he opened his eyes, Dom Jacques was slapping him on the cheek.

"Brother Antoine," he said, "why are you not eating properly?"

He told the abbot he had a delicate stomach. The abbot ordered the kitchen to serve Antoine whole milk at every meal, and from his place at table he watched Antoine swallow it all down.

Anemia was not what bothered Antoine. He was hardly aware of its symptoms, except for vague aches and pains when he worked among the dairy cows in the barn. His mind was preoccupied with psychological discomfort, for the more he studied Buddhist monasticism, the more he felt he had been tricked. After all, he had been with the Cistercians for four whole years, and to very little effect. He had thought that these austere-looking monks, shaved and scrubbed, would draw him up a ladder of monastic discipline that would lead to perfection. Antoine wanted to be flawless. He wanted to be a saint: as clean as a piece of carved ivory, as pure-smelling as beeswax. And why had it not happened? Why was he so unaccomplished in the spiritual life, bored with the everyday sameness of it all? Why had he made so little progress in four years?

Only one answer was possible. Surely, Antoine thought, he did not live with real monks. Real monks did not scratch in odd places when they assembled to hear their abbot speak. Real monks did not belch in choir. Real monks did not eat so hurriedly in the refectory. Real monks had manners.

One evening during supper Brother Antoine was called to the telephone to speak to a Cistercian monk from Quebec, a Father Léon Gaide-Chevronnay, who wanted to pass along information about the Tibetans' itinerary. He said he would be traveling with the Buddhists to ensure that they made the proper connections.

"I will be in complete charge of their tour in Canada," he said in French. "I have been to Japan, you see, and I am quite familiar with Buddhism. You need not concern yourself about anything, Brother, except for transportation to and from the airport and, of course, our lodgings."

The hair on Antoine's neck bristled. "I am the official East-West Dialogue Contact Person for our abbey," he said. "I will not relinquish my responsibility for their visit. And I know my fair share about Buddhism myself, thank you."

Father Léon apologized. He only wanted to be helpful, he ex-

plained, and he thought his being with the Tibetans would relieve others of a burden. Antoine detected trouble, however, and did not look forward to fighting with Léon over these monks.

Further complications arose. Brother Norbert Gignoux, who was assigned to work in the forge but in fact could never be found there, took Antoine by the sleeve one day and hauled him into the scriptorium.

"Brother Antoine, I have a question for you," he said. His bushy white eyebrows twitched. Antoine was already late for the afternoon milking.

"We're not allowed to speak in here," he reminded Norbert.

"When you get to be seventy-four," Norbert answered, "you can do exactly as you like. Now, Brother, I want to know if these monks coming, are they Catholic?"

"As in Roman Catholic?"

"Yes," Norbert said. "I want to know if these Buddhist people are Catholic."

Antoine had to close his eyes for a moment. "No," he said. "They are Buddhists, Norbert. There is no such thing as a Tibetan Buddhist Roman Catholic monk."

Norbert's eyebrows continued to twitch, and he snorted. "Well," he said, "we ought to pray for their salvation. Perhaps we could baptize them while they're here."

This was exactly the kind of nonsense Antoine had feared. He had no doubt that the Tibetans were monks of spiritual depth, far beyond anything Brother Norbert could imagine, and Antoine did not want someone of Norbert's ilk offering prayers for the Christian conversion of the Buddhist visitors even as they were listening. He asked the abbot to silence Norbert, to prevent his offering public prayers, but the abbot refused.

"Norbert means well," Dom Jacques said. "The Tibetans will understand."

THE Buddhists arrived on a weekend in September. The air was cool, but ice had not yet formed on pools of water along the road. Leaves had turned into cascading colors of lemon, orange, and raspberry, and a vague smell of ripe apples hung in the air. Brother François and Brother Antoine met the Buddhists at the airport. Among the first passengers to disembark was Father Léon. He wore civilian clothes in public, just as François and Antoine did. Moments later three Tibetan monks appeared, clothed in identical ox-blood robes. The first was Geshe Damchöe Gyaltsen, professor of dialectics. He was supported by two younger monks. Léon explained that Geshe Damchöe was not feeling well, having caught a severe cold in Montreal. He was supported on his left by the eighteen-year-old Venerable Sering Wangchuk, the geshe's English and French interpreter. On his right was the Venerable Tenzin Dechen, who also spoke some English. He was fifteen. He looked more like twelve. Father Léon introduced everyone and asked the Canadians to return the goodwill gestures of the Tibetans. They folded their hands and bowed. The Tibetans then put white scarves over their

hosts' necks as a sign of best wishes. An awkward moment of silence followed, and just when Antoine was about to ask about the fourth monk, a shriveled peanut of a person appeared with the last of the passengers from the airplane. He wore the same oxblood robe. He smiled broadly and without benefit of a full set of teeth. This was the Venerable Ngawang Chonzin.

The heads of all the Tibetans were shaved. Sering and Tenzin both had smooth walnut-colored scalps. Their luminous eyes made them seem happy even when they were not smiling. The geshe had several weeks' worth of stubble on his overly large head. He looked sick and puffy in the face. Patches of yellow skin framed his eyes. On the tiny one—the old monk who got off the plane last—the lack of hair revealed a bumpy, gourdlike skull, discolored in places as if he had slept in dirt. He smiled incessantly.

Because of the sickly geshe, no time was wasted returning

THERE WAS EARTH INSIDE THEM

There was earth inside them, and
they dug.

They dug and dug, and so
their day went past, their night. And they did not praise God,
who, so they heard, wanted all this,
who, so they heard, witnessed all this.

They dug and heard nothing more;
they did not grow wise, invented no song,
devised for themselves no sort of language.
They dug.

There came a stillness then, came also storm,
all of the oceans came.
I dig, you dig, and it, the worm, digs too,
and the singing there says: They dig.

O one, O none, O no one, O you:
Where did it go, then, making for nowhere?
O you dig and I dig, and I dig through to you,
and the ring on our finger awakens.

—PAUL CELAN (1959)
translated from the German by John Felstiner

to the abbey. Father Léon proved to be pushy and difficult about all the arrangements, just as Antoine had feared. He demanded changes of schedule and accommodation, along with certain dietary adjustments.

"No meat," Léon said. "And, of course, they want no milk."

The Tibetans were given rooms inside the cloister grounds, in what was called the old seminary house, a big white clapboard building sheltered by trees near the river. The geshe went to bed at once, while the peanut Ngawang, who never left off smiling, put a pillow on the floor in the hallway and sat on it to say his beads.

"Mantras," Sering explained. "We're obliged to recite one thousand mantras a day, but Cello says ten thousand or more. The beads help keep track of the number."

"Cello?"

"Yes," Sering answered. "It's a nickname. You may use it if you like."

Because Antoine found the name Ngawang unpronounceable, "Cello" was a good alternative, and the little man did seem a brown, worn-out old instrument.

The abbot came to speak with Father Léon, and while they were thus occupied, the young monks asked Antoine to give them a tour. He took them to the wine cellar, where Father Cyprien made wine from Australian raisins; to the bakery, where Brother Jules made heavy whole-wheat and honey loaves each day; and to the scullery, where Father Casimir sliced cheese and laid out portions for the nightly collation. He also took them to the bee yard, where Father Anselme examined hives without benefit of a veil; to the forge, where Brother Emery repaired brake shoes and tractor gears; and to the barn, where Brother Gennade milked sixty Holstein cows by machine. As soon as the Tibetans saw the cows, they began to speak rapidly to each other in their own tongue; the flow and contour of their voices sounded like a gentle agitation of smooth stones in a brook. Tenzin became very shy and covered his face. Sering spoke to Brother Antoine in English, asking if they might have a drink of fresh, unpasteurized milk. Antoine hesitated for a moment, remembering Father Léon's orders, but then he went to fetch cups.

"We like," Tenzin said after he drank the foamy liquid. "We very much miss yak milk."

"Yes, yak milk," Sering said, looking at Antoine with large, shiny eyes. "It tastes very much like yak milk." Tenzin held a hand in front of his mouth to hide the moustache that had formed there. "Hot yak milk with tea and butter and salt. This is our very best favorite drink."

The information surprised Brother Antoine, and it made him question books. It also caused him to wonder how precise was Father Léon's knowledge of Tibetan monasticism. Perhaps Buddhist dietary laws in Japan differed from those in India.

Meanwhile, Father Léon had come in search of the young monks. He had gone through the abbey, and when he could not find them there, he looked around on the farm. He found Sering and Tenzin in the chicken coop with Antoine.

A bantam rooster had been holding the attention of the Tibetans; they were amused by his crowing and by the way he strutted before hens twice his size. When a hen fell down on her breast before the little rooster, he proved too small to climb on her back. Sering and Tenzin whooped and laughed over the little cock.

Father Léon cleared his throat with a sharp cough. "The Tibetans have their own schedule for meditation," he said. "We mustn't be keeping them."

Antoine glared at the priest. He was about to voice a complaint about how some people can ruin a good deal of fun, but Sering and Tenzin had already dropped their interest in the rooster, and they waved good-bye to Antoine, smiling politely. They walked away with Father Léon.

Chickens had never been so interesting, Antoine thought, and he was delighted with his new young friends, amazed by how lively monks could be. He decided that he enjoyed them even more than he had anticipated. But he was also confused, because they seemed such ordinary people. Antoine reminded himself that they were really only teenagers. He wondered if he would have shown as much understanding if he had seen Father Norbert laugh at a bantam rooster.

THE Tibetans had their first formal encounter with the entire Cistercian community on the following day, in the chapter room. The abbot asked Father Léon to introduce the guests. The priest did so. Antoine closed his eyes and frowned: he considered Léon's words unctuous and condescending. Besides, Antoine had not been called upon to facilitate the meeting in any way.

The geshe was asked to speak first. He held seniority among the group, because of his learning: *geshe* meant "doctor" in their language. Although his face was sallow, he stood for the entire address. He did not flag at all. He spoke in a monotone that sounded almost like chant, and went on and on, sentence by sentence, for an hour and twenty minutes. Sering translated with confidence, as though he knew the geshe's words by heart. It was all about bad thoughts. When someone raised a hand, it was ignored. Later Antoine learned from Tenzin that Buddhists considered it bad manners to question a geshe before he was finished speaking.

Fathers Cyprien and Marie-Nizier were the first to nod off during the homily on bad thoughts. Nizier snored loudly, but this did not seem to affect the geshe's concentration in the least. Others began to drop their heads and breathe heavily. The geshe continued in his trancelike tone, moving his mouth in a steady, monosyllabic pace, without any hint of excitement in his eyes. All the while Antoine kept his eye on Cello, who paid no attention whatever to the geshe's delivery. He smiled broadly while reciting mantras on the rosary. His murmuring lips produced the sound of a baby chick calling in distress.

"Bad thoughts lead to bad actions," the geshe explained. Bad actions create more bad thoughts. A vicious cycle results,

and produces unhappiness. "There is much unrest in the world," Sering translated. "People are not happy, because of their bad thoughts. And they take their bad karma with them into the next life. Over and over people struggle with bad thoughts and bad actions, while souls are reincarnated as worms or angry, howling ghosts. We must put away bad thoughts and keep our minds at peace." This was the substance of the geshe's vast speech.

When at last he bowed, all rose from their benches and left the chapter room for common prayer. Lunch followed in the refectory. Boiled potatoes and green beans were served, along with a noodle soup and thick slices of buttered bread. To Antoine's dismay, the geshe ate as heartily as anyone, taking potatoes into his mouth quickly and with evident relish. Though Antoine nursed only a small cup of broth, no one seemed to notice. Dom Jacques pulled him aside after the meal.

"The Tibetans look uncomfortable to me," he said. "They look cold. Perhaps you could find some coats and shoes." Robes and woven sandals were the extent of their dress, Antoine had noticed, and he was perturbed that Father Léon had not thought of their comfort in Quebec. He went to fetch coats and sweaters, thick socks and shoes, from the wardrobe in the attic, and took them over to the old seminary house in a wheelbarrow. When Sering and Tenzin saw the pile, they poked through it, examining each article, pulling at it and trying it on while laughing at each other. Tenzin went inside with a thick coat and threw it over Cello. Sering selected a coat, a sweater, woolen stockings, and shoes for the geshe. Then the teenagers chose colorful clothing for themselves, articles that seemed to blend well with their oxblood robes and saffron undergarments.

THE next day the Cistercians were allowed to question the geshe. He sat alone under the crucifix, on the abbot's throne, while Sering translated the questions. Someone asked how old he was. Another asked at what age he had become a monk. A third asked if Buddhists believed in a heaven, and Brother Norbert wanted to know if Cello was saying the same rosary that Catholics said. To all these questions the geshe responded with the same answer: Bad thoughts must be banished from the mind.

While this was going on, Antoine nervously pulled at his ear. He began to realize that as long as the geshe was present, the other monks would remain silent, except of course for the necessary translation, and for Cello's incessant whispers. He made plans to get rid of the geshe.

That evening he tapped lightly on Father Léon's door. A moment passed, and he heard footsteps.

"Yes?" the priest asked. Only one eye and a nose were visible behind a crack in the doorway.

"Excuse me, Father, but I noticed today at the conference that the geshe is definitely not looking well. In fact, I see that his color has become worse since he arrived."

"Really?" Léon said, opening the door wider. "I thought he

was perking up.” He held a book in his hand, a finger stuck between the pages. He wore odd half-moon spectacles on his nose. Antoine continued in an evenly paced whisper, the most authoritative voice he could muster.

“Did you have a doctor look at him in Quebec?”

“Why, no,” Léon said, rubbing the book against his nose. “We didn’t have time, what with our schedule. Besides, it’s just a case of the grippe, don’t you suppose? I feel rather bad about hauling him all over the country this way, but we do have a schedule to keep.”

Antoine lifted a hand to his mouth and paused for what he hoped would seem a grave moment of consideration.

“Well, now, Father,” he said, “imagine the consequences if the geshe were to have serious complications. How would anyone know until it was too late? What if he had walking pneumonia, for instance? Or a bacterial infection of the lung? Who are we to say? The geshe could become dangerously weakened. And what would happen then? Your tour might be held up. You’d have to explain to everyone how seeing a doctor had never occurred to you. And if the geshe should die . . .



Well, Father, you must understand how I want to save you embarrassment.”

By four o’clock the next afternoon Father Léon and Geshe Damchoe were at the Victoria Hospital, in Winnipeg. While they were away, Antoine went to the abbot and told him that the remaining Tibetans wanted to speak to the community. Then he told the Tibetans that the community wanted to ask them questions. A conference was quickly arranged.

They gathered in the chapter room. This time Cello was given the abbot’s throne. He crawled up into it and sat on a

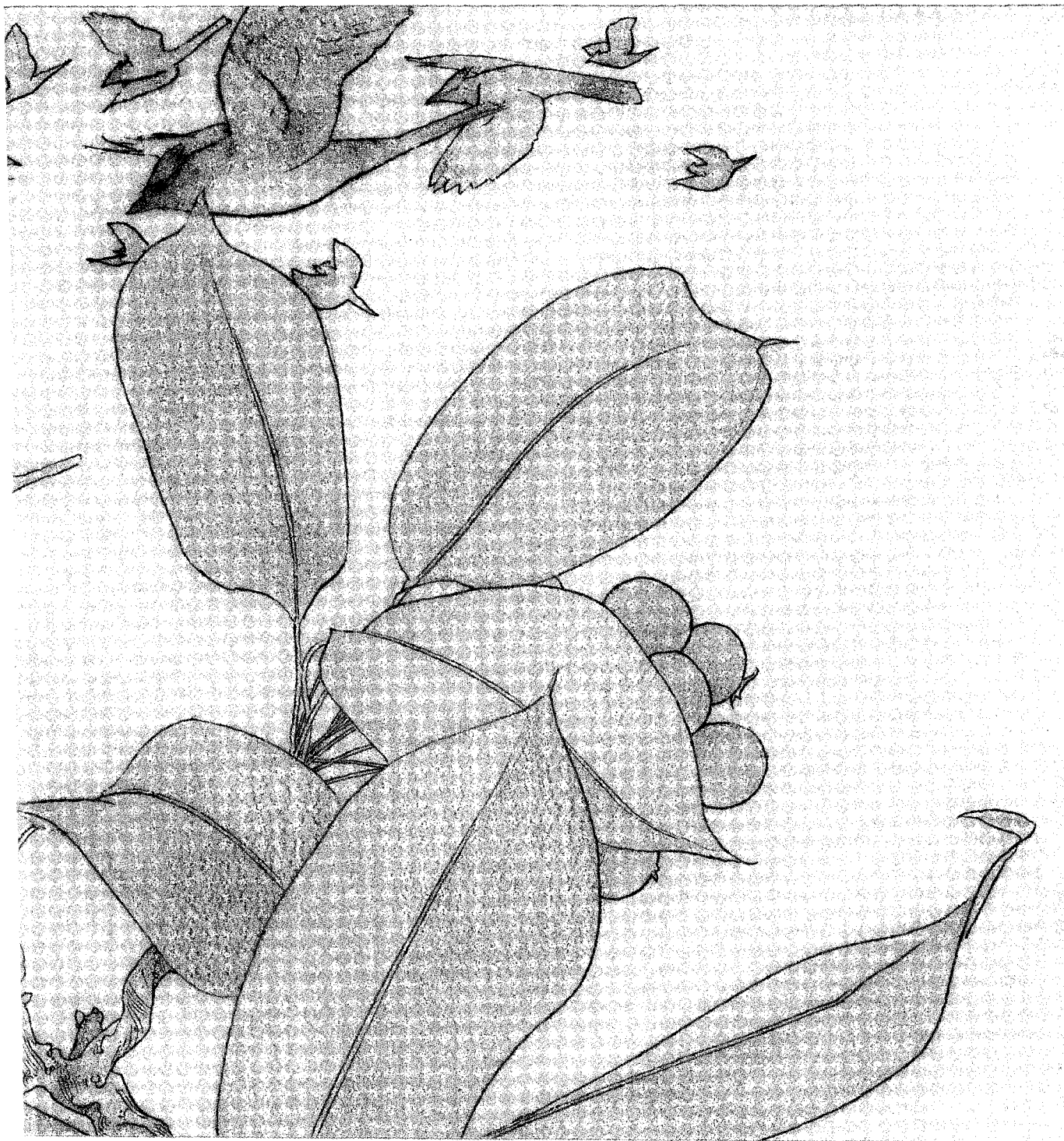
cushion with his feet dangling over. Thus seated, he smiled and muttered his prayers. Sering and Tenzin sat on either side of him. Cello took questions, answering them without hesitation. Sering translated.

“How many vows do you take?” someone asked.

“Tibetan monks take a vow to abandon each of the two hundred and fifty-three downfalls,” Cello said. “Nuns vow to avoid only the eighteen root downfalls.”

“Why do women take less?”

Cello rubbed his nose. “Because vows must be received



from the novice by a living monk or nun, and the tantric tradition died out among Tibetan nuns."

"When did you enter the monastery?"

Cello laughed. "I was given to the monastery as a child," he said. "Most monks and nuns begin their monastic lives this way. In fact, the best monks and nuns are those who spend early formative years memorizing all the necessary scriptures and living a monastic life while they are most impressionable. Adults may enter the monastery, of course, but they never make very good monks or nuns, because they haven't memorized the necessary scriptures."

"How old are you?"

Cello had no idea. No record existed. He explained that he had been given to a monastery in Tibet, and when the Chinese occupied the country, his monastery was destroyed with all its records. The Chinese put an end to religious freedom, and Cello fled to India with thirty companions. Only three of them survived the trip through the mountains.

Brother Norbert raised his hand. Antoine felt the blood rush to his head. He thought Norbert would ask if Cello believed in the Virgin Mary, if the Tibetans would consider giving up the error of their ways and being baptized as Roman Catholics. Antoine feared that Norbert would offer a prayer on the spot for the conversion of the heathen and the liberation of the world from the dark fog of Buddhism. Antoine thought for sure Norbert would inform Cello how stupid it was to believe in reincarnation, to believe in howling ghosts or prayer wheels. But Norbert did none of these things.

"What does the name 'Cello' mean?" he asked.

Sering translated the question. Cello raised his eyebrows and then spoke briefly in the bubbling language they used. The whole room waited for a translation, but Sering hesitated. Cello waved a hand to encourage him.

"*Cheh'leh*," he said, "is the word for 'nun.' You see, Cello is a woman. She is the abbess of the famous Geden Choling nunnery, in India."

Mouths dropped open, and Antoine heard gasps. No one said a word. The Cistercians needed time to absorb the fact that the short, wrinkled person on the abbot's throne was not a monk. The cloister had been invaded. A woman had taken the abbot's throne.

Everyone turned to the abbot. He was seated on a bench like the others, portly and overheated. At first Antoine thought Dom Jacques's face was red with anger, but then he noticed that the abbot's shoulders were moving up and down. For a whole minute Antoine heard only the thick sound of his own pulse in his ears, while he wondered whether the abbot was laughing or weeping. Then he noticed the abbot's eyes, how they sparkled. Dom Jacques's mouth fell open, and he let out a short hoot that began the rumble of his laugh, and this set off a chain reaction with everyone in the room.

Cello smiled broadly, showing her four little teeth. Even with laughter coming from all around her, she took up her beads and continued her mantras.

The tension in the room dissipated. The laughter died down, but no one knew what to do next. Tenzin covered his mouth. Sering's cheeks were rosy with embarrassment, and he cleared his throat.

"We didn't want to tell you," he said, "because it seemed to us a discourtesy. We had no idea, in India, that you wanted only monks. We didn't know how very important it is for you to exclude women from your monasteries. After we brought Cello all this way across the ocean for our tour of North America, we thought it ungrateful for us to disappoint you, so we said nothing. After all, what were we to do with Cello? She is, after all, the abbess of the Geden Choling nunnery, and the founder of five other nunneries. Besides, who would know that she is a woman? Our heads are shaved. We wear the same clothing. She may as well be a monk. In our world, because we remain celibate, we are equal. We are more alike than different. And even without such considerations, each of us has been a man or a woman in a past life, and each of us will be a man or a woman again, unless we are reborn as higher spirits. So, you see, it makes no difference."

The abbot rose and adjourned the meeting. He immediately summoned Brother Antoine to his office. Antoine worried. As official East-West Dialogue Contact Person, he thought he would be blamed for having staged a debacle. Inside Dom Jacques's office he looked at the floor while sitting in a chair facing the abbot's wide oak desk.

"Brother Antoine, I thought it best to inform you about things as they are," Dom Jacques said. Antoine's palms began to sweat. "You know," the abbot continued, "that Father Léon insisted upon taking Geshe Damchöe Gyaltsen to the hospital. It was a very wise decision. The geshe has a bad cold, of course, but the doctors have discovered an aortic insufficiency near the lower left chamber of his heart. This condition may be life-threatening, and he has been persuaded to give up his tour. Father Léon will accompany him to a Tibetan monastery in Colorado, where he will be looked after by American doctors. Meanwhile, Sering, Tenzin, and Cello will continue on to Saskatchewan."

"I will notify the other abbeys that Cello is a nun," the abbot said. "She will be respected as an abbess, of course, but the cloister must be observed. I was startled and amused by this revelation of identity, but I must uphold the rules about cloister."

Antoine nodded and smiled. He kept silent, but he was fuming that Father Léon had been given credit for the hospital visit. Who cared about Cello, he thought. She was old. It didn't matter any more if she was a man or a woman.

"A magnificent human being," the abbot said, "this woman who has suffered grave injustice, in the mountains watched her companions die, been in exile all these years—yet she is so cheerful. So humble."

Antoine nodded. But he said to himself, *She has no teeth. How can anyone with no teeth be "magnificent"?*

"She's not what I expected," he said to the abbot. "I mean,

even beyond the surprise, her being a woman, she's too odd to be an abbess. I had hoped for someone more dignified."

The abbot opened his mouth to say something but tapped his fingers lightly against his lips instead.

"Brother Antoine," he said after a moment of silence, "I want to thank you for your assistance as Contact Person. The Tibetans are scheduled to continue their tour tomorrow. It has been a rare opportunity, this exchange of cultures. Perhaps you have some private questions for Cello? I give you my permission to speak with her."

Antoine rubbed his chin. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "I don't think I need to talk to her. I want someone more interested in meditation. She just says those mantras over and over. I find that boring."

The abbot leaned back in his chair. "You're missing a golden opportunity."

The only opportunity Antoine wanted was to take rightful credit for having saved the life of Geshe Damchöe Gyaltsen, something Father Léon did not deserve. Then an idea flashed into his head. He could explain to Cello, Sering, and Tenzin that *he*, Antoine, had saved the geshe. If he could tell them how it happened, how he had gone to Léon and begged the priest to take the geshe to a doctor, they would realize Antoine's virtue and how much they owed him.

"Yes!" Antoine said to Dom Jacques. "On second thought, there might be something I could discuss with Cello."

HE went off to the old seminary house. He found Sering and Tenzin outside, pushing the wheelbarrow. Cello was seated in it, like a small Oriental dignitary. All her earthly belongings were in a little felt bag. She was speaking softly to her carriers, in a confident and reassuring tone, without the usual rosary in hand. Antoine made them stop.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "Where are you taking her?"

Cello stopped speaking. Sering smiled and said that they had been told to move the abbess out of the cloistered grounds to the gatehouse, where Brother Henri would give her a room.

"Oh, yes," Antoine said. "Such a bother." He stood in the path of the wheelbarrow. All three Tibetans smiled at him, but he did not move.

"I've come to set something straight," Antoine continued. "The geshe's being in the hospital—that was my idea. I'm the one who told Father Léon to take him there."

Sering looked at Tenzin, and they spoke briefly in their native tongue. Sering looked back at Antoine.

"This hospital is not a good idea?" he asked. "The geshe is in a bad place?"

"No," Antoine said. "You misunderstand. *I* am the one who saved Geshe Damchöe Gyaltsen's life. That was not Father Léon's idea."

"That's fine," Sering said. "We are not unhappy."

Before Antoine could explain further, the wheelbarrow was taken up, and he had to move out of the way. Cello continued speaking in a thin but expressive tone, much like a Chinese grandmother telling a bedtime story. Antoine followed alongside. The little procession moved down the road and past an orchard where red, nutlike crab apples hung in profusion on branches.

"What is she saying?" Antoine asked.

"She is giving us a teaching," Sering explained. "Her subject is Gelugpa, or the Yellow Hats, one of the principal sects of Tibetan Buddhism, to which His Holiness the Dalai Lama belongs."

Cello's cheerful, rocking words seemed somehow connected to the movement of the wheelbarrow, and Antoine had difficulty believing that she was talking about anything serious.

"Can you tell me what she is saying?" he asked.

"It's very complicated," Sering answered. "In general, she explains that the real ground of Gelugpa is knowledge of suffering. Only when a person is fully convinced of the immensity of suffering can enlightenment follow."

"Oh," Antoine said.

"This suffering," Sering continued, "must be recognized as a universal condition, and the monk or nun must want deliverance for *all* beings from this suffering. Only then can enlightenment, or *sunyata*, be experienced."

"Really," Antoine said.

They had reached a picket fence, and Antoine opened the gate for the wheelbarrow. After they had passed through, he turned back to check the latch, just above a yellow sign that read MONASTIC ENCLOSURE in black letters. Cello had finished speaking, and she pulled from her felt bag the old, discolored rosary. The road ran ahead of them into cool shadows of elm and ash trees, and just beyond that was the gatehouse. When they arrived there, Brother Henri was waiting for them on the screened porch. Rubbing his purple-veined nose, he offered no words, not even to the abbess, who seemed to be a man even yet, the same person as when she had arrived, bald and stooped with years. Henri came down the steps to collect her little bag, and the two of them disappeared into the gatehouse.

"Is she upset?" Antoine asked.

"Upset?"

"At being moved," Antoine said. "Is Cello upset inside?"

"Oh, no," Sering answered. "She is perfectly healthy."

"I mean, is she angry, about being put out?"

Sering laughed and said something in Tibetan to Tenzin. The blush on Sering's face was of unmistakable innocence. "Cello would sleep on the sidewalk without hesitation," he said.

Brother Henri appeared on the porch with a rubber ball. "Eh?" he said to the Tibetans, and before he got an answer, he threw it out at Tenzin. The boy was delighted, and the ball was soon going back and forth in a wide arc between Sering and Tenzin. The teenagers whooped and laughed, and Henri, without so much as a grin, turned and re-entered the gate-

house. *Just as I expected*, he seemed to be thinking. *Boys are the same everywhere.*

Antoine caught the ball once, but then waved himself out of the game. The Tibetans ran down the road on which they had come, looking spry in the late-afternoon light. Antoine followed them as far as the crab-apple orchard. He felt sad that they would leave tomorrow, to travel on to Saskatchewan. He wished that he were taking Father Léon's place, but he had to admit that he knew next to nothing about airports—probably less than the Tibetans—and besides, Brother Gennade depended on his help in the barn.

With the Tibetans gone, Antoine knew, he would no longer be official East-West Dialogue Contact Person. Life would sink to the ordinary again.

He opened the gate in the picket fence and went inside the monastic enclosure to the orchard. Sitting beneath an apple tree, he asked himself what he had learned from his contact with Buddhists. The first thing that came into his head was how little he had learned from books. "People are far more complicated than books!" he said aloud.

The short, twisted trees in the orchard offered their tiny crab apples. The fruit was plentiful even as the branches were losing their leaves. From where he sat he could see the white seminary house, flanked by several yellow elms. The air was cool and thick with the odor of pumpkins that grew just over a hedge and down by the river.

Antoine felt on the cusp of grasping something important about monasticism, some common thread between East and West that he could identify and present to the abbot, who would be suitably impressed with his insight. And then perhaps Antoine would discuss it with the Tibetans before they left in the morning. Yes, but he could not quite name it, the lofty idea he was after, and he decided that what he needed was a bit of meditation to shake the thought loose.

THOUGH he sat for some time under the tree, no profound thoughts occurred to him. The sun was not visible behind the abbey, to the west, but the evening sky was bathed with its scarlet influence. Birds sang across the fields up and down the river, their chorus resonating sweetly.

He pulled out his rosary and made the sign of the cross. Antoine said his prayers in a whisper. Wrapping his feet beneath him, he attempted to be very solemn. He wanted to banish all bad thoughts and put his mind perfectly at peace.

His prayer went well. He imagined that he looked like the Buddha himself, under a flowering lotus tree, serene in medi-

tation. He imagined himself to be Saint Benedict or Saint Bernard, caught up in tender and undisturbed prayer.

On a nearby tree a flock of cedar waxwings pecked at the shiny crab apples. They exhibited identical rose plumage, with tiny crests of feathers. Suddenly they all flew at the same instant.

A gentle breeze played at Antoine's ears. He closed his eyes to the birds. His mind was nearly empty of distractions when he heard something peculiar: a dull repeated noise. It would not go away. Antoine whispered his rosary louder, but the noise continued. It sounded like heavy apples falling on the ground, one by one, methodically. He struggled to put the noise out of his mind, but he could not, and the more he tried, the more exasperated he became.

The rhythmic thuds persisted. Antoine ground his teeth. Sweat rolled down his forehead. He simply had to know the cause of the noise.

He opened his eyes. Slowly he got to his feet and began to walk toward the sound, hunched and stalking. Over the short grass, a few trees away, he saw the small, bent figure of Cello in her oxblood robes. With her bare feet she was stomping on fallen crab apples, one after another, breaking them open, beating them with her heel into a pulp. This done, she would bend low and pick at them, putting bits of apple paste into her mouth.

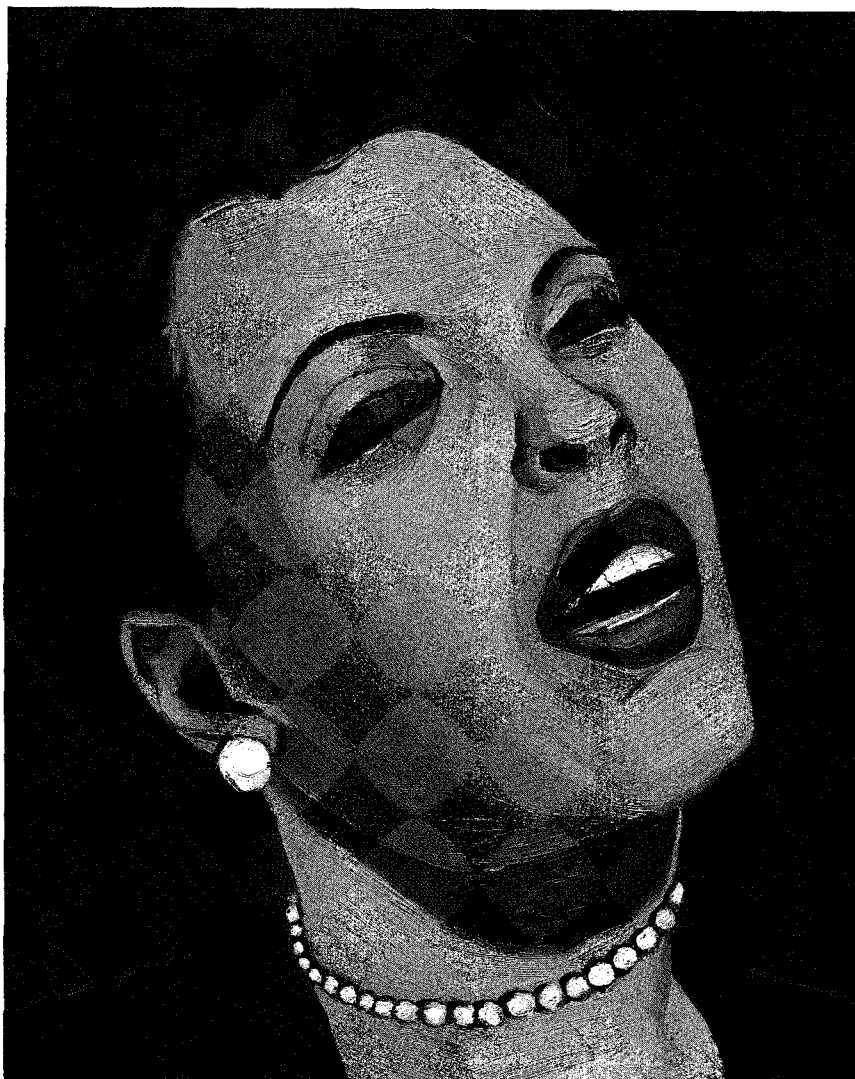
From a distance she looked like an abandoned and hungry child. Antoine was transfixed. He had never seen anything so peculiar: there she was, the Venerable Cello, spiritual mother to 6,000 nuns, eating crab apples from the grass.

As sunlight drew away from the orchard, it came to him: the thread that bound their lives together. Cello was abandoned by society. She was marginal. Antoine realized that the abbess was as defenseless and as irrelevant to the world as an orphan. And being a monk, so was he.

The experience of many days clicked into a clear order in his head. Antoine saw before him a Cello who had survived immense suffering in the Himalayas to offer a living witness to anyone interested: nothing less than the reversal of world order. Weak as she was—weak as all human beings are—she had found freedom from pain, which was the same as freedom from the desire for fame and fortune.

Cello seemed unaware of Antoine's flabbergasted stare. She straightened her rounded back. She looked at the crab-apple tree. Then, brushing her knotted fingers back and forth over its trunk, she appeared to thank a perfect living creature for its fruit. And when the wind died and the birds stopped singing, Cello walked back toward the gatehouse, making her way to bed. ☯





Our Lady of Sorrows

Willfully unaware of the facts of her professional life, listeners persist in thinking that Billie Holiday felt their pain

FEW people alive today, even among her most ardent fans, have heard Billie Holiday other than on recordings or seen her other than in photographs and random film clips. Holiday was eighteen years old and a worldly former prostitute when she recorded "Your Mother's Son-in-Law" with Benny Good-

by Francis Davis

man in 1933; she died from the cumulative effects of heroin and alcohol in 1959, a ravaged forty-four. Yet with the obvious exception of Frank Sinatra, who was born in the same year as Holiday but outlived her by almost four decades, no other recording artist from the first half of the twentieth century seems more

real to us—more like our contemporary.

Jazz aficionados have always enjoyed nothing more than debating the relative merits of different performers. But when conversation turns to Billie Holiday, the only way to start a fight is to state a preference for early, middle, or late—her jaunty recordings of the 1930s, her diva-like ballads of the 1940s, or her work from the 1950s, when she had almost *nothing left* but compensated for her husk of a voice with the intimacy of her phrasing (closer to speech than song). That Holiday was the greatest woman jazz singer ever is accepted as incontestable fact, no matter how fond you or the person you're talking to might be of Mildred Bailey, Ella Fitzgerald, or Sarah Vaughan.

But Holiday has never appealed exclusively to jazz listeners, nor has her appeal ever depended solely on her vocal artistry. As was true in 1939, when she first sang the anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit," to an audience consisting mostly of bohemian artists and left-wing intellectuals at Café Society (a Greenwich Village nightclub whose owner, Barney Josephson, and regular patrons were as committed to racial integration as they were to the finest in jazz and cabaret), many people today are unable to listen to Holiday without projecting into whatever lyric she happens to be singing their sense of her as a martyr to an uncaring world and to her own bad judgment.

Holiday, born Eleanora Fagan, was black, the child of an unwed mother. Rumored to be bisexual, she was drawn to abusive men; on her recordings of the song "My Man" the lines "He beats me too / What can I do?" are disturbing less for the sentiment than for the near-ecstasy with which she delivers them. Raised as a Catholic, Holiday, according to at least one biography, may have seen her inability to conceive when she was married as divine retribution for having aborted a teenage pregnancy by sitting in a bathtub full of hot water and mustard. She was a substance abuser whose name recognition made her an easy target for publicity-hunting police departments; during her final hospitalization she was arrested for illegal possession of heroin, fingerprinted, and photographed for mug shots on her deathbed. As a convicted user, she

was prohibited by law from performing in New York City nightclubs for the last twelve years of her life.

Singing should have been her salvation, and perhaps it was. But there is a widespread belief that she was discriminated against even as an artist, especially toward the beginning of her career, when, according to a dubious bit of folklore, white performers fed off Tin Pan Alley's choice cuts and black performers were forced to make do with the musical equivalent of intestines and jowls. Although famous, Holiday never achieved the mass popularity of some white big-band singers, possibly because the liberties she took with melody and rhythm required of listeners a sharper ear than most of them had. Or was it, as she may have thought, simply because she was black?

Holiday was, I think, a victim of both injustice and her own vices—a week's worth of *Oprah*, with the requisite confessional streak. She may have sung that what she did was nobody's business (on a fiercely independent number she borrowed from her girlhood idol Bessie Smith), but she made it everybody's business with the publication of her "frank," if not always factual, autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956), actually written by the journalist William Dufty. A prior knowledge of Holiday's hard knocks darkens some listeners' perception of even her earliest recordings, which were ebullient more often than not. The singer nicknamed "Lady Day" or just "Lady" has become an all-purpose Our Lady of Sorrows—embraced by many of her black listeners (and by many women and gay men) not just as a favorite performer but as a kind of patron saint. She touches such fans where they hurt, soothing their rage even while delivering a reminder of past humiliations and the potential for more. Especially since the 1972 Diana Ross movie, loosely based on Holiday's loose-to-begin-with autobiography (and perversely enjoyable as a color-conscious variation on an old Lana Turner or Susan Hayward tearjerker), part of Holiday's allure has come from her intuitive swing and the interpretive depth she acquired with maturity—qualities matched by no other woman singer, and among male singers only by Louis Armstrong (in headlong swing) and Frank Sinatra (in depth of interpretation).

EVEN leaving aside the morass of race and sex, Holiday is a giant subject for a biographer. A friend of mine, a fellow music critic, gave up on the idea of writing a book about her when he realized that each photograph of her seemed to show an equally beautiful but otherwise entirely different woman—a phenomenon not fully explained, he thought, by her mounting drug habit and evident fluctuations in weight. There are at least four full-length biographies of Holiday; the one that achieves the best balance of empathy and detachment is Donald Clarke's *Wishing on the Moon* (1994), but still the reader comes away from it convinced that Holiday and her moods were finally unknowable.

In *Strange Fruit* (2000), a slim volume expanded from a 1998 article in *Vanity Fair*, David Margolick approaches Holiday sideways, examining her relationship to a single song. The lyrics of *Strange Fruit* are from a poem written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish schoolteacher from New York, who, following the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1953, adopted and raised as his own the Rosenbergs' two sons.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood
at the root,
Black body swinging in the
Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the
poplar trees.

In her autobiography Holiday recounted how she and the pianist Sonny White, working closely with Meeropol (who wrote under the pseudonym Lewis Allan), came up with a melody for "Strange Fruit." Reference books, however, list Lewis Allan as the sole composer, and Margolick offers evidence to substantiate that Meeropol wrote the melody as well as the words. Margolick presents one person after another telling of having been chilled to the bone on first hearing Meeropol's disturbing imagery and Holiday's restrained, almost serene delivery, whether in performance or on recordings (the assembled witnesses include Tori Amos, Cassandra Wilson, and a member of the lesbian a cappella group Amasong, all of whom have recorded versions of "Strange Fruit"). Along with its readability, the book's virtue is in shoehorning so much useful anecdotal information—about Holiday, Meeropol, Café Society,



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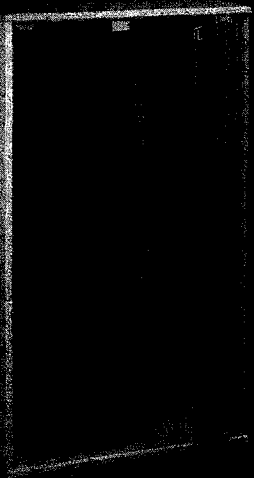


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and the mixture of rapture and disdain with which "Strange Fruit" was originally greeted—into a brief text.

Margolick shows how Holiday became identified with "Strange Fruit," and because he is a scrupulous reporter, he also questions to what extent and on what terms she identified with it. (He wisely dismisses persistent speculation that the poorly educated singer was only dimly aware of what the song's lyrics were about.) In Holiday's own book she told of once refusing to honor a request for "Strange Fruit" from a "bitch" who called it "that sexy song [about] the naked bodies swinging in the trees." Margolick repeats the story, but earlier offers this surprising observation from a black woman named Evelyn Cunningham, a former reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier*: "The song did not disturb me because I never had the feeling that this was something [Holiday] was very, very serious about. . . . Many times in nightclubs when I heard her sing the song it was not a sadness I sensed as much as there was something else; it's got to do with sexuality." Cunningham saw couples moving closer and holding hands as they listened. Holiday usually performed "Strange Fruit" as her last song, rightly convinced that nothing could follow it. But the late Jimmy Rowles, once Holiday's accompanist, told of a night in a Los Angeles club when she opened with it, after a beating from her husband and a shouting match with a customer at the bar.

According to Rowles, Holiday stormed offstage after that one number. If the story suggests that "Strange Fruit" ultimately became a way for her to release her anger, it also suggests that her anger could be unfocused, her racial indignation mixed up with resentment at her mistreatment by the men in her life, her persecution by the law, and the public's preference for blander female singers. Though I hear nothing sexual in her recordings of "Strange Fruit" (including the original, 1939 recording, which was reissued earlier this year on the CD *The Commodore Master Takes*), I think I understand how Holiday herself and those couples Cunningham noticed might have. Once Holiday added "Strange Fruit" to her repertoire, Margolick tells us, "some of its sadness seemed to cling to her." And some of the carefree sexuality she projected on her earliest recordings may have rubbed off even on "Strange Fruit."

Though “Strange Fruit” was unofficially banned from radio, and the label to which Holiday was then under contract refused to let her record it for them (she wound up recording it for Commodore, an upstart jazz specialty label operating out of a New York record store), the song had unexpected commercial benefits: in addition to establishing her credentials as a “race woman” (her own term for a woman committed to the cause of racial equality), it transformed her in the public’s perception from jazz singer to cabaret artist. As Margolick points out, however, “Strange Fruit” is unlike anything else she ever recorded. The only numbers even close to it, in terms of having lyrics that could be heard as pertinent to Holiday’s being a black woman (neither of them remotely a “protest” song), are “God Bless the Child,” about knowing what it’s like to be poor and hungry, and “Don’t Explain,” about forgiving a cheating husband or lover to whom the singer is in sexual thrall. Holiday is officially credited with having written both songs in collaboration with Arthur Herzog Jr., though many believe that Herzog wrote them alone, using Holiday’s anecdotes as a starting point and cutting her in on the credit as a reward for her recording them.

Except for coming up with a few impromptu blues lyrics at recording sessions, Holiday was certainly no songwriter. Yet we listen to her sing “Strange Fruit” and “God Bless the Child” and “Don’t Explain” and imagine that the lyrics represent her innermost thoughts. And we think we hear her keeping an ironic distance from the fluffier numbers that first earned her a following, in the late 1930s—improving them by virtually rewriting their melodies on the spot, and also implicitly offering a critique of the dreamy sentiments expressed by their lyrics, which were presumably of no relevance to someone with her knowledge of the seamier side of life.

IT’S easy to see how the idea got started that Holiday and other black recording artists were denied access to the best material of the late 1930s and early 1940s. From 1933 to 1942 Holiday, on her own or as a featured vocalist with all-star groups led by Teddy Wilson, recorded 153 numbers for Columbia, Brunswick, Vocalion, and Okeh (this material is chronologically assembled on the nine volumes of Columbia’s series

The Quintessential Billie Holiday). Although she had the honor of being the first nonoperatic singer to release a version of “Summertime” and was given a shot at “You Go to My Head,” “Easy Living,” and “These Foolish Things” when they were brand-new, nobody would remember many of the other songs she recorded as a young singer—including “Me, Myself, and I,” “Foolin’ Myself,” and “What a Little Moonlight Can Do”—if not for her alchemy. But did Holiday think of these songs as shabby goods? Did Wilson and her black sidemen? Did the record-buying public, including Holiday’s black fans?

The evidence overwhelmingly suggests not. According to Teddy Wilson, before each of their recording sessions he and Holiday would go through the new songs submitted to their record company by music publishers, and she would pick out the ones she liked best. Often “they were pretty good songs,” Wilson once said, by which he may have meant that many of them became hits.

In the 1930s Holiday was what would today be called a cover artist—recording her own versions of current songs originated by other performers. The term seems not to have come into widespread use in the recording industry until the mid-1950s, when Pat Boone and other white teen idols began “covering” rhythm-and-blues hits by Fats Domino and Little Richard, in direct competition with them for a place on the charts and with a distinct advantage in being white. But the practice is as old as the record business itself. Black performers have covered whites and also one another. The aim of Holiday’s first recording sessions with Wilson, in 1935, was to stock jukeboxes in black neighborhoods with cover versions of songs her label thought might soon become hits by white singers. In one sense almost everybody making pop records in those years was a cover artist: a song would be introduced by Fred Astaire or Alice Faye in a major motion picture, and other singers would see who could get a version into the stores first. Two or more per-

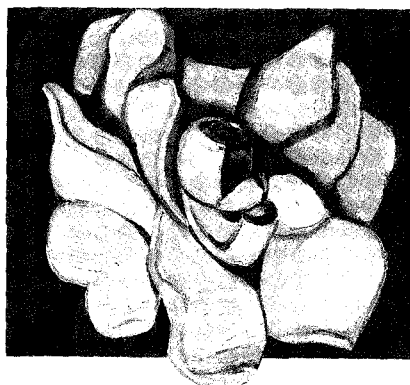
formances of the same song, recorded within days of each other, might become best sellers simultaneously, sometimes appealing to slightly different markets. Most consumers didn’t particularly care whose version was the original—only which version they liked best.

In 1937 Holiday recorded “A Sailboat in the Moonlight,” one of her most thrilling performances, with the tenor saxophonist Lester Young. This is often cited as the most obvious instance of her transforming the dross available to her into gold. But as Holiday entered the recording studio, Guy Lombardo’s version of the song was already on its way to the charts, eventually to become No. 1; it wasn’t necessarily a good song, but it was a hot property.

Among the famous composers and lyricists whose work Holiday recorded during the 1930s and early 1940s—when, myth has it, she was limited to songs beneath the contempt of white performers—were Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin, Harry Warren and Al Dubin, and Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields. The list of performers Holiday covered, or with whom she shared a hit song, includes many of the popular white singers of those decades, some of whom were featured with society orchestras and swing bands: Bob Eberle, Skinnay Ennis, Charles Chester, Bea Wain, Helen Ward, Helen Forrest, Edythe Wright, Jack Leonard (Frank Sinatra’s predecessor with Tommy Dorsey), and Harriet Hilliard (Ozzie Nelson’s wife and Ricky Nelson’s mother).

The performer she covered most frequently—no fewer than nine times, beginning with “I Wished on the Moon,” in 1936—was Bing Crosby, who had his pick of new songs, even though he didn’t always choose well (does anyone re-

member “One, Two, Button Your Shoe,” which he introduced in the 1936 movie *Pennies From Heaven*, and which Holiday covered that same year?). The runner-up was Fred Astaire, from whom she borrowed seven of the songs he introduced in *The Gay Divorcee*, *Swing Time*, *Shall We Dance?*, and *A Damsel*



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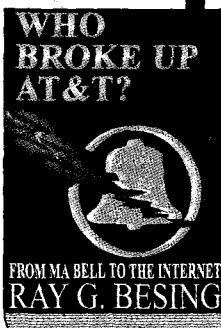
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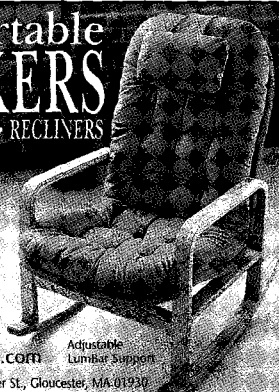
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in Distress. So much for the notion that the best popular songs of the late 1930s and early 1940s were, symbolically, cordoned off behind a sign that read FOR WHITES ONLY.

Not every song Holiday sang in that era had a pedigree; some of them, including "Eeny, Meeny, Miney, Mo," an early effort by Johnny Mercer, really were mutts. But it's wise to remember that many songs that strike us as nonsensical today were intended by their composers as "rhythm" songs; Holiday had fun with them, and so did her listeners. Did she find anything relevant to her own experience in the lyrics that movie stars like Astaire and Crosby sang to court their virginal leading ladies? Anyone reflexively answering no should be informed that the former Eleanor Fagan read romance magazines, longed for the day when she could record with strings, and adopted the name "Billie" from the silent-movie star Billie Dove.

Many 1930s leftists, disdainful of movies and popular music unless they delivered a forthright message along with entertainment, would have been appalled at such middle-class inclinations. In the view of many white intellectuals of the thirties, Holiday was a standard-bearer for the downtrodden who had more in common with the Scottsboro Boys or the kitchen help at Café Society than with white performers like Crosby and Mildred Bailey. I fear that this is the view of Holiday that has prevailed, even among some black intellectuals.

Holiday herself added to the confusion in *Lady Sings the Blues*, misleading readers (and possibly herself) about the early influences on her. She said she admired Bessie Smith for her big voice and Louis Armstrong for his feeling—no argument there. But she omitted Ethel Waters, the great black star of vaudeville and Broadway, whose influence Holiday may have been reluctant to admit because of a long-standing animosity between them (Waters was territorial about her songs, and the younger Holiday had made the mistake of singing one of them right in front of her). Holiday and Lester Young are often called musical soulmates, because his tenor saxophone and her voice were similar in timbre. Soulmates they were, but Holiday's phrasing and relationship to the beat were more like Armstrong's than Young's.

From time to time early in her record-

ing career, Holiday would revive an older song closely associated with another performer. She did her own versions of numbers first made popular by Waters ("Sugar," "Trav'lin' All Alone," and "Am I Blue?"), Armstrong ("All of Me"), and Bessie Smith ("St. Louis Blues"). But as if giving her audience a clue to her larger ambitions, she more often revisited songs first sung by and still closely associated with the most flamboyant white torch singers of the 1920s and early 1930s—Ruth Etting ("Mean to Me," "More Than You Know," and "I'll Never Be the Same"), Marion Harris ("The Man I Love"), Helen Morgan ("Why Was I Born?"), Libby Holman ("Body and Soul" and "Moanin' Low"), and Fanny Brice ("My Man"). At that point Holiday was arguably better suited to upbeat love songs with a hint of self-mockery—among them Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields's "I Must Have That Man," whose clever lyrics ("I need that person much worse'n just bad! / I'm half alive and it's drivin' me mad") let her indulge her rhythmic playfulness and a boundless *joie de vivre* that we tend not to associate with her, though maybe we should. It was a few years later, almost eerily coinciding with her first recording of "Strange Fruit," that Holiday acquired the maturity a singer needs to make her listeners feel as though they're the ones carrying a torch. (*The Commodore Master Takes* includes a haunting version of Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach's "Yesterdays," also from 1939, which seems to have been a turning point.)

What part heroin or brutal men or racial oppression played in Holiday's gaining greater depth we should be hesitant to speculate about. Not everybody who suffers becomes a great artist. Heroin bespeaks a death wish, but to the user it must also seem, if only at first, a life force—a source of defiant pleasure, like risky sexual encounters or an adolescent's first cigarette or drink. This self-abandonment is the animating quality I hear in Billie Holiday's early recordings, when she was defying social convention and her threatened marginalization as a black woman—and in her later recordings, when she was defying not only all of that but also the damage she had inflicted on herself. In fighting to become her own woman she also became her own victim, and nobody else's. ☞



New Life for Old Cars

Part mechanic, part artist, part detective, Paul Russell restores antique automobiles to their original condition—once he has determined what that was

ITALY'S Bugatti family was highly successful in the arts. Carlo, the patriarch, built his reputation on his furniture designs and was also an interior designer and sculptor. One son, Rembrandt, also became a

sculptor. The other son, Ettore, went into the automobile business—and in his hands cars became fine art as well. Among the meticulously crafted luxury and racing cars Ettore produced was the

Type 57 SC Atlantic, designed in 1936 by his son, Jean, to be the ultimate high-speed grand touring car (it later inspired the Chrysler Atlantic concept car). Only

two Bugatti Atlantics survive. One is parked among a small collection of Bugattis at the home of the owner, in Lyme, New Hampshire. The other has been shown at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

by David C. Holzman

The car exhibited in Montreal and Cleveland currently sits in the entryway to Paul Russell and Company, an automobile-restoration firm in Essex, Massachusetts. Customers can't miss it. The roofline and bulbous fenders sweep gracefully aft, as if sketched by Picasso. And yet there is a bold opulence about the big black car. It could have gotten a part in *The Godfather*.

Russell and Co. restored the Atlantic in the late 1980s for its owner, the designer Ralph Lauren. In 1990 the car won Best of Show at Pebble Beach, the leading concours of classic cars, where prizes are routinely won by Russell restorations. Lauren has been bringing antique cars (he has a fleet of fifty) to Russell since 1980. Russell bills \$65 an hour—\$20 less than my Saturn dealer. But don't bother to get an estimate on the '57 Chevy. For Russell, a forty-nine-year-old family man known for his in-

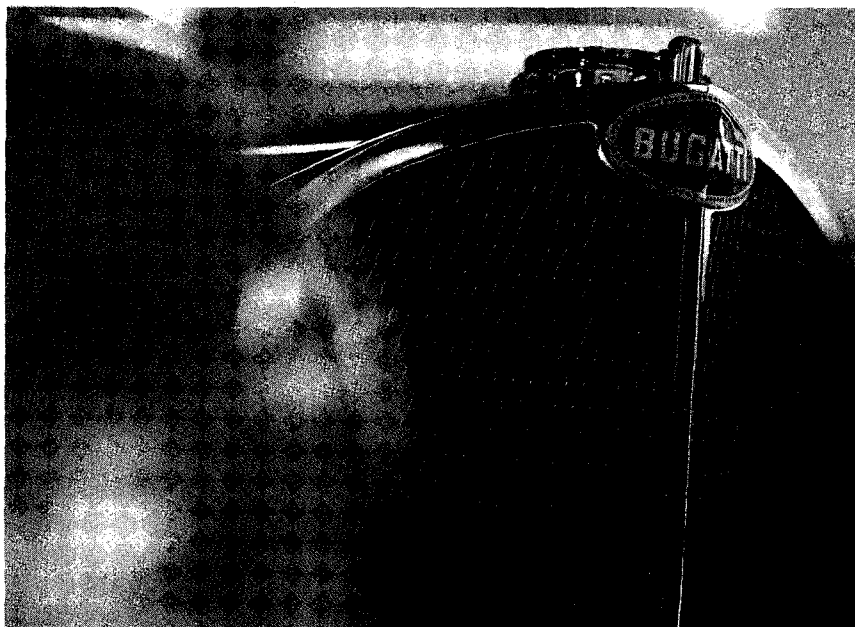
Bold opulence: the Bugatti Atlantic

tegrity, whose mild manners belie his eminence in the world of classic cars, restoration is a time-consuming labor of love. Every last bolt and surface, no matter how well hidden from view, gets attention from the company's crew of five mechanics, three body men, one coach-builder, and one upholsterer. A job can take two years, and generally costs from \$250,000 to \$500,000. As Paul Russell tells prospective customers, if their motives are pecuniary, they would be better off selling their cars as is.

Russell's own motives are clearly not pecuniary. The four to six restorations his company completes each year, together with the maintenance it performs on another 175 or so cars and a brokerage and advice service to help clients manage

Sprite that belonged to a friend's father. "It went around corners like it was on rails," Russell says. "I fell in love."

Russell prizes technological elegance above all else in cars. He loves the imaginative design that allows the engine of a Mercedes-Benz 300 SL to inhale more fuel and air than atmospheric pressure alone could pack into its cylinders, without relying on a turbocharger, or turbine-driven compressor, as some high-performance engines do. Visual elegance means far less to Russell. He is blind to the jaguar in a Jaguar and to the grace of the cougar in the muscular haunches and tapering abdomens of the Ferraris that repose in his shop. His daily driver is an Audi A4, a car that Russell describes as a "Porsche in sedan clothing."



their antique-car collections, gross only about \$2 million. Russell cannot afford his own services: his only classic car, a 1958 Lancia Aurelia B20 S, sits in pieces in a corner of the shop, perpetually awaiting restoration.

PAUL Russell's chosen profession would probably surprise those who knew him early on. Although he came of age at a time when the airwaves were saturated with musical paeans to Deuce Coupes, GTOs, 409s, and an elderly but lead-footed lady driver from Pasadena, he was not the least bit smitten with cars. His parents' vehicles—"practical four-door family units," in Russell's description—provided little inspiration. Then one day he drove an Austin Healey

Russell's predilection for technology over style is not surprising. The basement of his childhood was a workshop full of tools, where Russell spent many hours with his father, Frank, taking machines apart, analyzing them, and re-assembling them. Frank Russell was a machinist who eventually became the supervisor of engineering at Bolton-Emerson, a company in Lawrence, Massachusetts, that manufactured machinery for pulp-and-paper mills. Although he always regretted his lack of formal education, he took his greatest professional satisfaction in the years he spent as a machinist, because he could hold a job in his hands.

This satisfaction with hands-on work, Paul Russell says, was foremost in his

own mind when he decided to drop out of college (Lowell Technological Institute, where he was studying civil engineering) in order to become a mechanic. After working for a few years, first at an independent garage and then at BMW and Mercedes-Benz dealerships, he found himself "frustrated with the low level of quality you were allowed to do working on street cars—get the car in, do something, and get it out." He moved on to more-satisfying work in a restoration-service garage, applying his skills mostly to Mercedes. Over the next five years he struggled with whether to remain a mechanic or go into business, and took courses from the Small Business Administration. In 1978, when the owner of the garage decided to sell, Russell was ready to buy. Over the years, the business evolved into the one he runs today.

At first Russell specialized in the two kinds of Mercedes he knew and loved best: the 300 SL Gullwing (named for its doors, which open upward) and the 300 SL Roadster, a large two-seater sports car built in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He has long since branched out. His clients range from private owners of a single Porsche or Ferrari to Mercedes-Benz USA. His parts department fills orders from as far away as Pakistan.

Ironically, Russell has ended up like his father—supervising instead of working with his hands. But it never occurred to him, he says, to restore cars by himself, as a few of the other seventy or so top-flight car restorers in the United States do. To achieve the quality he wanted, he would need specialists.

"Paul goes about the restoration as a technical systems analysis," says Dick Hanrahan, a longtime friend and customer and a retired systems analyst himself. Russell, who was the captain of his high school gymnastics team, uses a different metaphor: he sees himself as a coach. "When a car comes in, the guys know that we are not going to be finished with it for eighteen to twenty-four months," he says, "so I talk about pacing." He tells them that if they think before they act, they can put time in the bank. But exactly how his employees do their jobs is up to them. The only demand Russell makes is for exceptionally high quality.

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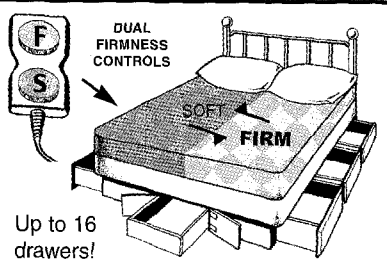
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average body shop might spend. Imperfections aren't minimized; they are literally rubbed out. "Then," Russell explains, "you do the fussy work of assembling the panels onto the body, making sure the gap between the panel and the body is four millimeters all around. It takes a lot of trial assemblies to make everything fit before you take it apart and paint it and then put it together again."

For many months a 1962 Ferrari 250 GT Short Wheelbase California Spyder sat on jack stands in one bay of the body shop. Russell always tries to salvage as many parts of the original car as possible. But much of this Ferrari was beyond salvaging, because of rust and bad repair work in the past, so the front bumper, the hood, and the door skins were made right here. Johnny Yanakakis, then one of Russell's body men, used a crown wheeling machine—a ten-foot-high cast-iron relic from the 1950s—to fashion the new parts from sheet metal. The machine looks like a giant vise, but instead of grips, two wheels come together to work the metal. One has a flat surface and the other is convex. They squeeze the metal into an ever thinner sheet, spreading it much as a rolling pin spreads dough, while the body man moves the metal back and forth, over and over.

It is not enough to achieve perfection of form, fit, and finish. For a car that will compete at Pebble Beach, or at Parc de Bagatelle, in Paris, the restoration must be authentic: the car must look exactly as it did on the day of delivery to its first owner. Even knowing what to aim for can be a tall order: a car may have been modified repeatedly in the course of forty or sixty years.

"This was the third Ferrari Barchetta made," Russell says, indicating a red shell sitting in the mechanical shop. Russell needed to know exactly how the Barchetta had been put together. Ferrari's archives were of little help: during its early years the company built only engines and chassis, contracting out the coachwork on its cars. The Carrozzeria Touring company, in Milan, had built the Barchetta's body, in 1949. So Russell flew to Italy to discuss the manufacturing details with Carlo Anderloni, who was the head of Carrozzeria Touring at that time. Russell suspected that the body of the Barchetta had been painted after it was attached to the frame (a reversal of the customary se-

quence), because he had detected some red paint on the shock absorbers and on parts of the chassis. Anderloni confirmed Russell's suspicions, and Russell planned the restoration accordingly.

Similar sleuthing helped Russell to determine a crucial fact about the original appearance of one of Ralph Lauren's cars, a 1930 Mercedes-Benz SSK known, for its first owner, as the Count Trossi. The car had come to Russell with a removable top that deeply offended his sensibilities, both in its appearance and in the makeshift way it attached to the body. He did not want to restore that top, but he knew he would have to if it had been with the car all along. Again, the answer was not to be found in the company's manufacturing records. As was common in that era, Count Trossi had bought the chassis and drive train but had designed the body himself, commissioning an independent coachbuilder to make it. Russell was unable to find the builder, who may well have died. So he obtained the car's original registration from the Italian motor-vehicle registry. Inquiring about the document's details, he learned that in Italy cars are taxed not according to sale price but according to their equipment. "The documents said 'aperto,' meaning a car without a top," Russell says. "We were relieved to confirm that this Mickey Mouse-looking top was not original."

Russell learns still more about how various cars were made as his employees disassemble them. Referring to the first pre-war Mercedes he restored, a 1938 540K, he says, "It was tremendous fun watching my upholsterer, Mike Curley, take those seats apart, to see something that hasn't been touched from the time it was new. The horsehair padding is hand-quilted, covered in muslin, stitched to various parts of the seat. . . . They obviously expected this to last a long, long time. I remember seeing Mike shaking his head, saying, 'These guys were crazy.'"

Lauren's Bugatti Atlantic held its own surprises. With flanges as its seams, the car appears to have Mohawks on the roof and fenders. It was designed that way, Russell says, because Bugatti wanted to fashion the body from an alloy of aluminum and magnesium. This was the lightest feasible material, but because magnesium is flammable, it couldn't be welded safely with the equipment available at the time. Using flanges allowed

Bugatti to assemble the body with rivets instead of welds. However, when Russell's workers stripped the paint from the Bugatti, they discovered that the body was not a magnesium-aluminum alloy after all—it was plain aluminum. "I assume that from building the prototype, Bugatti learned just how impractical it was to build a body out of magnesium," Russell says. "But by that time they had become invested, you might say, in this design feature, and in the kind of demonic look it gives the car."

Russell's quest for authenticity extends to preserving imperfections in a design. The original welds on the Ferrari Barchetta's tubular body frame are so messy that it seems no attention at all was paid to their appearance—a fact that clearly pains Russell, even though the joints are hidden. "If I had guys that welded like this, they'd have to find other work," he says. But the welds are in good condition, so Russell will leave them alone. Moreover, he will use obsolete manufacturing techniques if they are needed to re-create the look of the original precisely.

However, Russell is quite willing to use modern methods if they will save his customers money without sacrificing authenticity of appearance. He eschewed the original technique for stamping the Ferrari logo, a prancing horse, into new bolts for the Barchetta, because it would have required building expensive machinery. Instead, he explains, "we made a drawing of the horse and sent it to a company that scanned it, put it on a disc that runs a laser engraver, and had it engraved on the bolts."

THERE is always tension between preserving and consuming an artifact. The perfection of Russell's restorations heightens this tension, especially because he likes to see his clients drive their cars. Russell is enough of a driving enthusiast that he once took a course in vintage-auto racing. One customer asked Russell to drive his Mercedes Gullwing in the 1986 Monterey Historic Races, ten laps around the track at Laguna Seca, California. When Russell tells the story, a touch of regret creeps into his voice. "A good race driver always has the gas pedal or the brake pedal floored," he explains. "I put the equivalent of five thousand miles' worth of wear on the car in just that one race." ☼



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"Whodunit"

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The Fall Into Guns

Few Americans, this cliché-upending book shows, owned guns before the Civil War. What happened?

by Richard Slotkin

ARMING AMERICA The Origins of a National Gun Culture

by Michael A. Bellesiles.
Knopf, 603 pages,
\$30.00.

THERE are not many points of agreement between the National Rifle Association and the advocates of gun control, but they do share a view of American history. The NRA asserts that gun possession is a widespread American tradition as well as a constitutionally protected right. Advocates of gun control agree that the habits of action and thought that underlie contemporary gun violence have deep historical roots, but they see this legacy as a cultural liability we must work hard to overcome—if we can.

Michael Bellesiles's *Arming America* will compel both sides in the gun debate—and historians of American culture in general—to reconsider that history. Bellesiles has made a detailed study of the records of gun ownership and militia service in the thirteen colonies and the United States, from the beginnings of European settlement through Reconstruction. Blending quantitative analysis with a careful reading of public documents, he paints a new picture of the role of privately owned firearms in American history: until the Civil War relatively few Americans owned guns, and levels of interpersonal violence involving firearms were low, even in frontier districts. He concludes that "America's gun culture is an invented tradition. It was not present at the nation's creation. . . . Rather, it developed in a single generation [following] the Civil War."



There is a good deal of substantive history in *Arming America*. But as Bellesiles says, he is more interested in "the story of what was not," "the absence of that which was thought to be eternally and universally present—an American gun culture." Although the United States had a nominal citizen militia through most of the nineteenth century, Belle-

siles's analysis reveals that most militiamen ignored the requirement that they keep and maintain their own military weapons (typically muskets or rifles). Only during the earliest days of settlement, when the frontier was less than a day's ride from the Atlantic shore, were Colonial militias generally supplied with arms. In Colonial units mobilized for the

French and Indian War only 25 percent of the troops came properly armed. In 1803, 45 percent of enrolled militia members were properly armed, but by 1830 the figure had dropped to 31 percent, and it would continue to decline up to the eve of the Civil War. To estimate overall gun ownership Bellesiles uses a sample of probate inventories, which generally list all bequeathed property, including weapons. He observes that from 1765 to 1790, on average, only 14.7 percent of such inventories listed firearms, and although the percentage rose steadily (as guns got cheaper), as late as 1859 it had risen no higher than 32.5 percent. Frontier districts, where one would expect higher numbers, merely mirrored the national average. The highest levels—at times 25 percent above the national average—were found in the South.

If Bellesiles's figures are correct, then the "tradition" of bearing arms is a lot less traditional than the NRA would have us believe. Although probate inventories provide suggestive data, they probably understate actual levels of gun ownership. Not all estates are probated; not all probate inventories are complete. And one would expect the records to be least reliable in frontier districts, where guns might be necessary equipment in most households. But Bellesiles's analysis of the militia is persuasive, and supports his assertion that after the War of 1812 there was a sharp decline in the ownership of weapons for self-defense. Bellesiles offers several reasons for this trend. His analysis of gun manufacturing and marketing shows that until the 1840s firearms were produced in limited numbers by skilled craftsmen, and were therefore expensive to buy and maintain. As the threat of Indian attacks or invasion by European powers diminished, Americans simply had less need for expensive weapons for self-defense. And the economic value of hunting diminished with the growth of settlements.

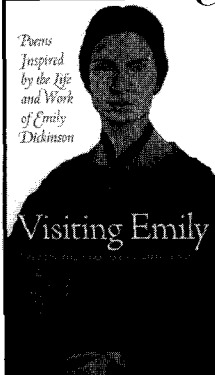
BUT gun ownership began to rise after 1840, and *Arming America* traces the processes that would by century's end produce a distinctive national gun culture. The techniques of mass production and serial fire perfected by Samuel Colt made guns cheaper to own and easier to use. The handgun—which had been a luxury item in the days of the single-shot flint pistol—was now a viable

weapon for the ordinary citizen interested in self-defense and killing small game. But lower prices alone did not cause gun ownership to spread. The California Gold Rush and the opening of the Far West to settlement increased population and activity in the contested borderlands between the United States and Mexico and around Native American tribes. The expansion of slavery into unsettled districts and the growth of large plantations (coupled with abolitionist agitation) led to more arming of planters' households and patrols. (Colt is said to have conceived the repeating pistol to enable a single white man to defend himself against an unruly gang of slaves.) One of Bellesiles's most important conclusions is that "racism determined the presence and nature of American violence more than any other factor."

Throughout the 1850s the numbers of both armaments and private military companies grew in anticipation of war. The Civil War itself led to the mass production and distribution of firearms on an unprecedented scale, and taught a generation of young men to kill. "By the mid-1870s," Bellesiles writes, "guns were everywhere in American life." Once cheap guns became available for a mass market, "reaching for the gun" in response to a crisis became easier for all citizens. But the postwar period also produced new motives for gun ownership and violence. Among the most telling parts of this book is Bellesiles's account of how this initial increase in gun circulation led to further gun purchases. In the pre-war period firearms were relatively rare even in those areas where the threat of violence was great. But where many or most men carry guns, a gun will be seen as necessary for self-defense—and for self-respect. What Bellesiles says of the 1870s is equally valid today: "The fear becomes the danger, as Americans acted on the imagined terrors around them and armed themselves for private protection."

The last decades of the nineteenth century were also marked by a series of social, economic, and political upheavals, which produced new inducements to social and personal violence. The abolition of slavery and the attempt to reconstruct the South as a multiracial society produced some of the worst violence—Ku Klux Klan terrorism, race riots, and bloody strikes, culminating in the estab-

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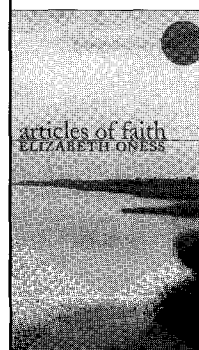


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lishment of the Jim Crow regime in the South. Elsewhere in the country rapid industrialization and urbanization, coupled with unprecedented levels of immigration from new ethnic and racial sources, led to increasingly violent labor struggles and rising urban crime. Here racism combined with class antagonism to produce a widespread fear of social violence. Strikers came armed to the picket line (sometimes with weapons maintained for their militia service); companies met them with hired armed guards and “detectives”; and gun manufacturers “played on the fear” to market their wares to the public.

But it is only in the last chapter and the epilogue of his book, which deal with the Civil War period, that Bellesiles fulfills the promise of his title and engages with the immediate origins of the modern gun culture. The preceding chapters debunk the idea that anything like that culture existed before the Civil War. Although this has the salutary effect of deflating the NRA’s glorification of Colonial and Revolutionary Americans as “a people numerous and armed,” it slights the specifically cultural developments that shaped our codes of civil and personal violence. American culture provided successive generations with a set of motives for violence, which persisted through eras when the gun was not the weapon of choice. Hence the actual distribution of weapons at any given time may be less important than the values that came to be associated with owning and using weapons.

BELLESILES’S treatment of the militia is a case in point. Free white Americans may have been casual about serving, but they were jealous of their right to serve—and concerned to exclude those classes they deemed inferior or dangerous. The right to serve thus became a hallmark of equal citizenship. Colonial militias excluded from service those residents not classed as freemen—poor whites, slaves, indentured servants, women, and (sometimes) non-Protestants. From 1776 through the Age of Jackson the expansion of citizenship rights extended the franchise and the right and obligation of militia service to the white male portion of the excluded categories. But free blacks were still denied the right to serve in the militia, even in Massachusetts and other anti-slavery

states. Thus the enlistment of blacks during the Civil War signaled their transformation into citizens.

The militia issue highlights a critical difference in the way American and European cultures permit violence. American culture has tended, from the eighteenth century on, to assign an extraordinary value to individual rights, desires, and property. So we came to treat weapons, and the right to use them, as we treat all forms of private property—granting the widest possible latitude of action to the owner. Our self-defense statutes are more permissive than those of any other industrialized nation. Under English law if a person menaced with deadly force is able to flee, he is obliged to do so. American laws since the Jacksonian period have typically declared that a man may defend himself with deadly force when he has a credible belief that he is menaced with deadly force. Under this rule a Louisiana man was acquitted in 1993 after having shot an unarmed Japanese exchange student who came to his door looking for a Halloween party.

Historically rooted customs and traditions further broaden the already wide acceptance of private violence that is provided by statute law. Courts have customarily treated certain kinds of personal and social grievance as legitimate reasons for homicide, even when the victim posed no threat of bodily harm. In the Jim Crow era whites who murdered blacks for such offenses as refusing to step aside in the street and looking at a white woman were typically let off by white juries. “The courts granted virtual immunity to whites accused of crimes against black men,” the Berkeley historian Leon Litwak writes in his authoritative book *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (1998). Sometimes the threat of extralegal lynchings was sufficient to make white courts acquiesce in “legal lynchings.”

The physical abuse and even murder of women—which in the case of adulterous wives might be sanctioned under “unwritten law”—has historically been treated with similar tolerance in times and places in which a woman’s “emancipated” acts were construed as an assault on her husband’s male identity and social status. Changes in the law and the social roles of women and minorities since the New Deal have altered—but not eliminated—jury nullification of and judicial

leniency toward racial or sexual violence. It remains part of our cultural tradition to regard certain kinds of grievance as legitimate grounds for violence.

SO whether or not the Americans of 1740–1840 kept or used firearms in large numbers, they established the codes that identified the right to own and use weapons as a hallmark of citizenship, and provided rules for identifying when, and against whom, it was morally permissible to use deadly force—thus laying the foundation that was in place in the 1870s, when, as Bellesiles rightly says, the American culture of violence was radically transformed and modernized.

Bellesiles misses an opportunity to analyze more closely the social and political dynamics of the era that immediately shaped the modern gun culture. Guns are not simply tools or commodities; they are instruments of social power. And social, economic, and demographic changes over the period 1865–1925 led to a series of complex and often violent struggles for power. The industrialization of the economy threatened the status and well-being of workers and farmers; worker discontent seemed to businessmen and conservatives to threaten revolution; and the demographic transformation produced by new immigration and the migration north of southern blacks threatened social hierarchies. In response, cultural and political leaders at both national and local levels began to advocate a new approach to the administration of violence in American life. They called for more-coercive measures against the new forces of disorder, from restricting the ballot for immigrant and racial minorities to an increased use of the military against organized labor. Gun manufacturers marketed pistols to the public for self-protection in a time of fear. But to governments and corporations they offered a new weapon, the machine gun, which was designed to allow a small professional force to outgun a conventionally armed mob.

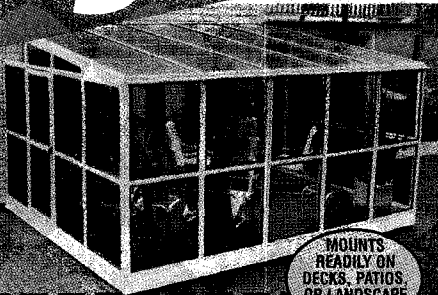
This era also saw the modernization of vigilantism, a form of social violence whose roots have been traced to the Colonial period. Vigilantism is the extralegal use of deadly force by an organization of private individuals to achieve some public or political goal. Vigilance, or “Regulator,” movements figured periodically in the development of frontier settlements before 1850, and two urban

movements—the abolitionist Vigilance Committee in 1850s Boston, and the anti-political-machine San Francisco vigilantes of 1856—had important political agendas. But after 1865 vigilance organizations sprang up in a wide variety of settings, usually with the sponsorship of local elites or businessmen and sometimes with the support of legal or government authorities. A modern wrinkle in traditional vigilantism was the development of professional vigilantes: “detectives” hired to disrupt or intimidate organizations of workers and small farmers, or to assassinate organizers. The largest vigilance movements were those mounted by the KKK and similar organizations during Reconstruction, during the Jim Crow era, and in the civil-rights era. But such movements were also mounted against Asian immigrants (1850–1880); in land disputes and range wars, such as the Mussel Slough conflict of 1880 and the Johnson County War of 1892; and against labor unions during periods of industrial strife (1874–1877, 1885–1895, 1903–1925).

It is important to analyze turn-of-the-century vigilantism, because the anti-government rhetoric and fetishization of firepower of the contemporary gun-rights movement come from vigilante values. The gun lobby invokes the classic fears behind vigilantism: of a threat to personal safety by the lower orders or an assault on vital interests by government officials. It seeks to establish the right of a private individual to wage social war, at will, against “government tyranny,” the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, or any class of people deemed “dangerous” to public safety. In the words of the NRA spokesman Fred Romero, “The Second Amendment is not there to protect the interests of hunters, sports shooters, and casual plinkers. . . . The Second Amendment is there as a balance of power. It is literally a loaded gun in the hands of the people held to the heads of government.” Gun-rights fundamentalists wish to protect from regulation not only the hunter’s rifle or the shopkeeper’s .38 but also military weapons that are capable of killing large numbers of people very rapidly.

Vigilante values are invoked in the abstract by the leadership of the NRA and similar organizations. But those values are acted on by a variety of groups that use military-style weapons to gain or

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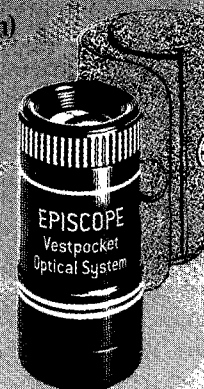
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maintain social or political power. Self-styled militias such as the Montana Freemen, the Militia of Montana, and the various "Common Law" sects typically operate as vigilance organizations, using their weapons to intimidate others in their communities, usually to gain some advantage or immunity: to evade taxes or debts; to win boundary disputes with neighbors or with the Bureau of Land Management; to evade or nullify government regulations and policies that offend them, such as school integration or laws against spousal and child abuse. The terrorism associated with white-supremacist organizations such as Aryan Nations, WAR, Christian Identity, World Church of the Creator, the Phineas Priesthood, and The Order is framed by its exponents as a form of political struggle, analogous to the revolutionary terrorism of the IRA and the Basque ETA. Some of these groups do have roots in political organizations—including the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazi Party. But typically they are private enterprises, founded by charismatic leaders or organized around a single armed and alienated family, which value guns as instruments of political strength and seek to acquire as much firepower as they can.

The number of guns in circulation is certainly an element in the modern gun culture, but the cultural ethic that sanctions private violence is the critical element. Switzerland and Israel, where army reservists maintain their own weapons, have comparable levels of distribution. Yet those weapons are rarely used for private revenge or crime. Nor can we put all the blame for gun violence on the excesses of the contemporary media. European and Japanese audiences consume violent American films as avidly as we do, and their own studios produce highly successful ultraviolent movies without comparable national homicide rates. What makes the difference is not just the availability of weapons but the ethic, rooted in our cultural history, that teaches the people how, when, and on whom violence may be used.

Arming America is a groundbreaking study of the material basis of the gun culture. I hope Bellesiles will continue his work, bringing the same stringent quantitative analysis and a deeper reading of cultural history to bear on guns and the civil violence of the twentieth century. ☸

Mongrel Capitalism

by Alex Soojung-Kim Pang

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ON several evenings recently I counted the languages spoken at the playground where I take my daughter. English and Spanish were constants, French and Chinese were frequent, and on various nights I could hear Dutch, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Japanese, and Russian—just what one would expect in Silicon Valley, which is a magnet for engineers, designers, managers, and other professionals from all over the world. Many of the families here maintain traditional customs and active ties to the countries where they (or their parents or grandparents) were born, but also deal easily with American institutions and culture. Several children at the playground were of mixed ancestry, like my daughter (and me). There's no commonly accepted term for people like us: our lives cross too many boundaries—racial, ethnic, national—that are usually (and erroneously) regarded as fixed and all-important. Call us hybrids—or, a cruder term, mongrels. Hybrids today are growing in numbers, public prominence, and economic importance: they jump-start regional and national economies, give industries a critical edge, strengthen states, and diversify the intellectual capital of corporations. Indeed, according to G. Pascal Zachary's new book, *The Global Me*, hybridity is the modern philosopher's stone, the key to economic vitality among global corporations and advanced nations.

Institutions and nations that know how to intermingle traditions have been around for a good while. Cross-cultural trade has long been a part of world history, and the leaders of the early and medieval Christian Church came from all over Europe and the Mediterranean. In the modern era

skilled migrants have energized European cities—such as seventeenth-century Amsterdam and nineteenth-century London—that needed outsiders to develop local industries and global connections. What's different today is the degree to which such mixing produces a new kind of people, and to which hybridity's benefits translate into significant economic advantages. Many factors now favor hybrids, who are more numerous and visible than ever: transnational, interracial, and multi-ethnic marriages are at an all-time high. Civil-rights activism over decades has created an atmosphere in many advanced nations in which discrimination is discouraged (if it hasn't been eliminated) and mixed social identities are possible. Transoceanic telephone service, e-mail, and international flights have made it easier to maintain strong, real-time ties around the world. Disney and Nike are global commodities, but so are Hong Kong action films, African music, and Brazilian soap operas (this kind of globalization has been accelerated by the Web). Transnational careers and reverse migration are more common. Finally, a greater consciousness of the "invention of tradition" has made it easier for people to see conventional ethnic and racial categories as resources, not restrictions, and to define themselves not just by what they "are," or what others say they are, but by work, passionate interests, and experiences. Such people aren't rootless cosmopolitans or eternal outsiders, Zachary argues; it's now possible to have both "roots" and "wings"—to develop meaningful affiliations without renouncing one's origins.

ADVANCED nations welcome such people in part because their information-intensive economies need them. Hybridity—whether in the boardroom, on the project team, or in the regional office—hardwires creativity into an enterprise. It provides access to a distinctive expertise that can help to serve local markets without resorting to the insulting tactic of race-based marketing. "Rather than try to pigeonhole its customers," *The Global Me* argues, "the hybrid enterprise acts as if they are all mongrels." In other contexts hybridity permits a measure of ethnographic distance that is valuable in asking basic questions and challenging convention. Multinational corporations use people with mixed backgrounds to find their way in local markets, customize standard

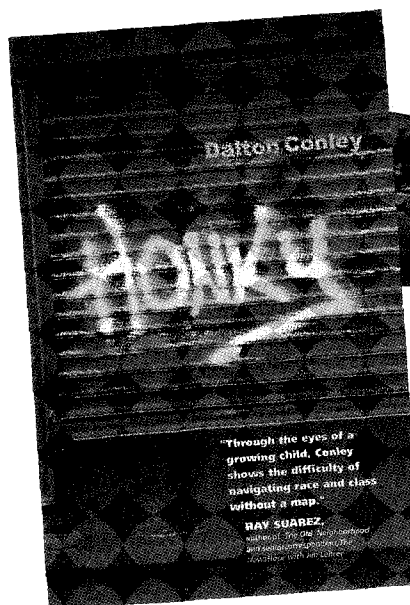
products for new circumstances, and finesse international tensions while maintaining their own technical standards and practices. Indeed, work emerges as one of the new critical sources of identity: in many of the case studies of individuals that are scattered throughout *The Global Me* (some first written about by Zachary in his capacity as a *Wall Street Journal* reporter), professional ability or devotion to work is as defining as nationality. Even sports teams benefit from mixing it up. European soccer teams now combine German offensive strength, Brazilian flamboyance, and English long-ball handling. The 2000 U.S. Postal Service Pro Cycling Team includes racers from Belgium, Britain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, and South Africa, as well as the United States.

Nations themselves benefit from the commingling of races and ethnicities. Ireland recently began to welcome foreign immigrants and descendants of the Irish diaspora, and this has resulted in a resurgent economy and the beginnings of a more expansive Irish identity. (In contrast, Germany and Japan, two nations notable for their arm's-length official attitudes toward foreigners, are heading into economic and demographic trouble.) Despite the growing importance of trade organizations and multinational corporations, nations continue to play a critical, sometimes slighted role in the global economy. If they guarantee individuals' rights and punish discrimination, set economic and immigration policies that encourage foreign investment while limiting exploitation of labor and the environment, and use history and national symbols to promote social cohesion and inclusiveness, they can contribute to global development and reap benefits locally. Alternatively, they can promote suspicion of outsiders, cast minorities as villainous strangers, and consign themselves to the world's backwaters. This also means that traditional ethnic-based politics, whether played out in cities or in national assemblies, is economically unaffordable: leaders will have to learn how to cross gerrymandered ethnic boundaries and deal with people as—well, as people, rather than as members of manipulable groups.

THE *Global Me* is enthusiastic about hybridity, but Zachary has no illusions about the difficulty of developing and sustaining a mongrel identity. Doing so requires a knowledge of the limits soci-

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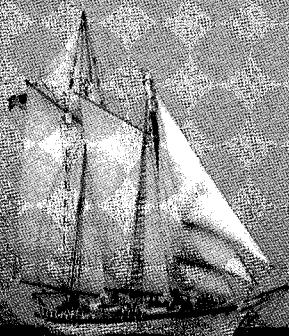
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ety places on the process, a large measure of self-consciousness and honesty, and a refusal to choose sides or give up when asked what you *really* are. But rather than focus on the problems, Zachary wisely—and, I think, rightly—is fundamentally upbeat about the enterprise: it's a trial, but a trial of faith. Built into this perspective are assumptions that will infuriate liberals and conservatives alike. Some left-leaning readers will dismiss the book's view of corporations as creative, changeable enterprises that are "hybrid hothouses," rather than monolithic, rapacious entities (*The Global Me* focuses on high-tech and consulting companies, not agribusiness or apparel). They may also reject its claim that multiculturalism can be a competitive advantage in the marketplace, as an attempt to make global capitalism hip. But the idea that racial and ethnic backgrounds can actually be useful in the workplace (even in unpredictable ways) will draw fire from conservatives. Anyone who believes that race and ethnicity determine world views (or that multiracial classifica-

tion is the enemy of traditional racial politics) will be challenged by Zachary's existential, make-your-own view of identity and his rigorous insistence on the instability of racial and ethnic categories. This ideological eclecticism and the array of sources on which the book draws shows that *The Global Me* is itself a hybrid, a work that crosses boundaries and eludes academic classification.

The author of two earlier books (the underappreciated *Showstopper!*, about the development of Windows NT, which combined *The Soul of a New Machine*'s inside view of high-tech innovation with Quake's high body count; and *Endless Frontier*, a biography of the American science czar Vannevar Bush), Zachary is making a bid to become a serious public intellectual who can combine familiarity with the scholarly literature and contemporary politics and economics with first-hand reporting. His account of the trials of multiracial, multinational identity is so good that I'll give it to my daughter when she starts asking the hard questions. ☪

SHORT REVIEWS



Test of Courage: The Michel Thomas Story

by Christopher Robbins.
The Free Press, 400 pages,
\$27.50.

According to the philosopher and World War II veteran J. Glenn Gray, the lever of courage on the battlefield is love: the bonds forged in combat move men to risk their lives for one another. Fear of letting the other fellow down makes heroes, Gray writes in *The Warriors* (1959). But what if there are no other fellows to let down? Solitary courage must fling its grapples upon the fear-slicked self. Christopher Robbins's subject in this true though sometimes hard-to-credit biography—the tests of courage are so many, so solitary, and so successfully passed—is

Michel Thomas, now a world-famous linguist and language teacher. In Robbins's vivid telling Thomas is a Holocaust survivor who escapes the death camps by daring stratagems, a French Resistance fighter who outwits Klaus Barbie, a U.S. Army intelligence officer who captures war criminals with brilliant ruses, and a lover who never lets the imminence of death ("And as we were making love . . . an American artillery position opened fire right above us in the hills") dash his desire. "There were those who despaired [but] I was not prepared to let reality overwhelm me," he says, describing the metaphysical impertinence that saw him through a war that broke nations. "I wanted to find a way to fight back." His story is almost too singular to be inspiring.

—Jack Beatty

**The Third Woman:
The Secret Passion That
Inspired The End of
the Affair**

by William Cash.
Carroll & Graf, 304 pages,
\$25.00.

This year we have seen *Greene on Capri*, Shirley Hazzard's lambent, affectionate, and eloquent literary memoir of her friendship with Graham Greene. Now, as a counterweight, William Cash offers us an erotic epic spiced with more than a little theology: Greene's passionate affair of many years with the beautiful American-born Catherine Walston. The novelist seems to have been as assiduous in sexual pursuits as in the search for God, and maybe more so—though Greene's adultery, to be fair, always took second place to the writing of fiction. Greene had a wife, two children, four mistresses (five, if Margot Fonteyn qualifies), and innumerable prostitutes, all while he continued his frantic pursuit of Catherine Walston and also wrote *The Heart of the Matter*, *The Third Man*, *The End of the Affair*, and *The Quiet American*. He somehow managed to survive this exhausting activity as a communicating Roman Catholic. Lady Walston, whose husband was rich and very tolerant, also slept with many men other than Greene, including an Irish revolutionary, an American general, and a priest or two. Cash goes so far as to justify his research efforts by claiming a central place for adultery among the inspirations for literature. *The Third Woman* provides hypnotic voyeuristic reading; but Cash's panting sensibility has trouble nailing down his argument.

—Peter Davison

Off Keck Road

by Mona Simpson.
Knopf, 176 pages, \$19.00.

Off Keck Road should not be read in public places, against the certainty of tears. Set in Green Bay, Wisconsin, from the 1950s to the late 1980s, written with a rare purity of style, this story of two women of different generations and classes, growing up and old, is continually moving in a wry, Chekhovian way. The novel is especially artful in its manipulation of setting to register the foreclosures of time and possibility. Bea Maxwell is a woman whom love passed by: from high school to col-

lege in Madison to her first job in Chicago to her return to Green Bay to care for her mother and begin a successful career—through the whole of a caring and love-worthy life—no man has so much as asked her out on a date. Love comes close once, when her boss makes an advance (“There was a kiss or almost, something between a bump and a kiss”), but a ringing phone kills the moment—her only one. Shelley, a little-valued daughter in a poor family, contracts polio in shake-your-fist-at-heaven circumstances. Disfigured, she at least finds sex. She asks her (older) lover if he notices her bad leg. “You’re different at first,” he says, “but then you’re not. Then you’re just young.” This is Mona Simpson’s fourth novel, written with compassionate realism.

—Jack Beatty

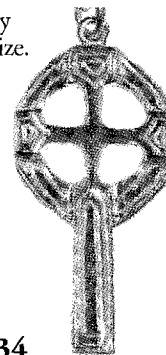
**The Dark Valley:
A Panorama of the 1930s**

by Piers Brendon.
Knopf, 832 pages, \$37.50.

For better and worse, *The Dark Valley* is, as its subtitle promises, panoramic. In a gigantic, sweeping history of the Great Powers in the grip of the Great Depression, Piers Brendon depicts, among dozens of other dramas, the Bonus March on Washington, the Concorde riot in Paris, Barcelona in paroxysms of revolutionary ardor, Moscow in the dull terror of the show trials, and post-*Anschluss* Vienna in anti-Semitic ecstasy. His astute pen portraits include all the main dramatic personae—Stalin, Roosevelt, Hitler, Mussolini, Blum, Chamberlain—and also dozens of secondary characters, among them the doomed Nikolai Bukharin and Britain’s “Iron Chancellor” of the Exchequer Sir Philip Snowden, who supposedly coined the term “the idle rich.” Although the book’s subject—“a low, dishonest decade,” in Auden’s phrase—is unrelievedly depressing, *The Dark Valley* is almost always gripping and often very funny. But it is unwieldy and uneven. Brendon arranges his impressionistic chronicle in chapters dealing with the individual Great Powers, so the relationships, chronological and otherwise, among events in the different countries can be difficult to discern. *The Dark Valley*’s accounts of the terror famine in the Ukraine and the Nazis’ book burnings are harrowing and exact, but only a careful reader will recognize that these two horrors were occur-

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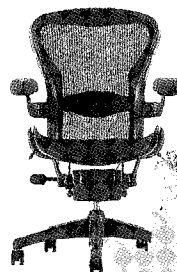
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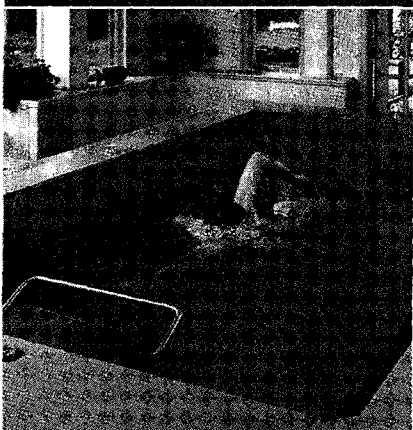
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ring simultaneously, along with Franklin Roosevelt's hundred-day flurry of New Deal legislation. Surprisingly, for a British historian who has previously written exclusively about Englishmen and Americans, Brendon's most trenchant and vivid accounts are of events and settings outside his field of expertise—Bukharin's trial and the decadent cosmopolitanism of Shanghai, for example. His depiction of the United States is a rehash of histories of the New Deal and American popular culture. And his account of Britain's appeasement policy is simplistic: Brendon, who also serves as the keeper of the Churchill archives, divides the actors in that drama into craven fools on one side and Churchill, the omniscient and indomitable hero, on the other. In doing so he virtually ignores the past thirty years of scholarship on this subject—which, while not exonerating the appeasers, reminds us of the terrible quandary facing statesmen in London as they sought to protect Britain's far-flung global interests (threatened by three aggressors in three theaters) with extremely limited financial and military means. Still, although Brendon's history sometimes lacks nuance and focus, he paints his panorama with verve and authority. A generation that has never heard of Joachim von Ribbentrop, let alone Pierre Laval (*Time's* 1931 Man of the Year!), and that was told that Newt Gingrich's "Republican revolution" was a truly world-historical event, could find few better renditions of a decade when all the great questions had yet to be settled.

—Benjamin Schwarz

A Life of James Boswell

by Peter Martin.
Yale University Press, 636 pages,
\$35.00.

Peter Martin has written the best biography of the greatest biographer in the English language. James Boswell was a literary idiot savant: to Carlyle's verdict—an "inflated, gluttonous creature"—should be added the qualities vain, buffoonish, dissolute, snobbish, and narcissistic (Samuel Johnson complained, "You have but two topics, yourself and me, and I'm sick of both"). But Martin illuminates how Boswell's often lovable faults served his peculiar genius. Boswell's exasperating peskiness, for instance, helped make him

an extraordinary character portraitist and chronicler of his age. He obsessively hunted celebrities and shamelessly intruded on them. He stalked—and charmed—Hume, Garrick, Reynolds, Goldsmith, Voltaire, Rousseau (onto whom, as Martin recounts in a funny, incredible chapter, he managed to glom for days, and with whose mistress he even had an affair), and, of course, his great catch, Johnson. Linked with what Martin persuasively describes as Boswell's manic depression was his womanizing of Clintonian dimensions, a subject that Martin treats in far greater detail than did Boswell's earlier biographers—appropriately, given what could fairly be described as Boswell's sex addiction and the attention he lavished on it in his journals. One of the many virtues of Martin's work is his successful synthesis of Boswell's life story with a keen analysis of Boswell's artistry—a rare virtue in contemporary literary biographies. This is a delightful, intelligent, authoritative book.

—Benjamin Schwarz

Transfigurations: Collected Poems

by Jay Wright.
Louisiana State University, 723 pages,
\$59.95/\$24.95.

It turns out that Jay Wright, an African-American poet from New Mexico, has been writing impassioned and lucid poetry for more than thirty years. Adept at narrative, at visionary celebration, at the imagery and symbolism of half a dozen cultures from Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the United States, these poems range in multiple voices through history and over several continents, dwelling on a sense of place and striving toward cultural self-definition. Unlike most other contemporary African-American poets, Wright draws for his figures not on the inner city but, rather, on sense-impressions from nature; he relies on language "bodied in the deep ground / of my tongue's impossible passage / through the ill-defined logic / of my body's exaltation." This immense work also exalts and celebrates the multicultural heritage of the American Southwest, usually in sweeping language. Sometimes, however, Wright descends to a sweetly memorable scale: "Invite me, woman, / to the music of your middle." At present he is living in Vermont.

—Peter Davison



THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Puzzle Quote

Answers to clues are to be entered acrostic-style, but column by column from A to M. When every square is filled, the diagram will contain a quotation (slightly amended) from the book *Chambers Crossword Manual*, by the British puzzle-writer Don Manley. Answers include one capitalized word.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 113.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13

Clues

- A.** Going west to help at school sporting venues (13, 6, 1, 3, 8, 11)
Order French article in *Sex Appeal* (9, 2, 4, 10)
The person speaking with army cop's kid (12, 7, 5)
- B.** Perennial worry about a heading in the wrong direction (3, 13, 9, 11, 7, 4)
Colonel's first love covered by popular picture (5, 2, 12, 8)
Encounter trailer in French and Italian (10, 6, 1)
- C.** Bad rep that is true possessed by no Conservative (12, 6, 1, 3, 7, 10, 5, 8, 11)
Carefully peruse eastern volcano's peak (2, 4, 13, 9)
- D.** Trim Parisian's original old letter (11, 2, 3, 6, 8)
Cause damage to engineer's extreme terminal (4, 7, 10, 13)
Proceed north when carried by United (12, 1, 9, 5)
- E.** Before 50, develop an aggressive tone (10, 11, 2, 3, 4)
Prison guard ignoring southern company (9, 8, 13, 5)
Military's van is west of town in film (1, 12, 6, 7)
- F.** One caught in calls for counterfeits (1, 7, 10, 13, 5, 8, 2)
Eighth letter in "Theodore" provided a clue (9, 3, 6, 12, 11, 4)
- G.** Engineer to push for result (6, 4, 2, 12, 11, 1)
Fleet securely positioned (10, 7, 8, 5)
Fall behind the French gunner's maiden (3, 9, 13)
- H.** Making a cut in capital for auditors (3, 1, 7, 11, 13, 9, 12)
Heat of battle, and odds of match (2, 10, 4, 6, 8, 5)
- I.** Lead against one hundred in deserts (1, 2, 13, 9, 7, 11, 4)
Union gets into plot, after I'm inspired (8, 10, 6, 12, 3, 5)
- J.** Offense hedges about bomb warning (9, 5, 2, 13, 8)
Royal Engineer in control (1, 6, 10, 12)
Blame my friends and me after round number (4, 3, 11, 7)
- K.** New dons carried omen (11, 9, 5, 8, 13, 12, 2)
Stooge keeps time in a blunt way (4, 7, 6, 3, 10, 1)
- L.** More unpleasant friend of the French in *Witness* (6, 5, 2, 9, 10, 12, 13)
Southwestern warriors hurt after a President's inauguration (7, 1, 11, 4, 8, 3)
- M.** Items in disorder left aboard ship (5, 7, 4, 1, 10, 8, 12)
Sailor's back from the Orient after the first (6, 13, 11, 9, 3, 2)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

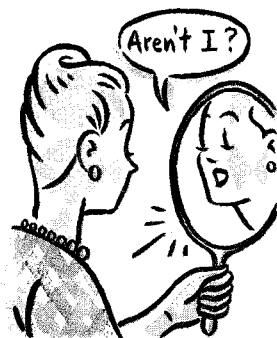
Is it correct to say aren't I? I am not a native speaker of English, but that expression simply does not sound right to me. I was relatively confident that it was wrong until recently, when I heard a distinguished British intellectual use it. I thought the proper way of asking this question was am I not? Am I right or aren't I?

Raúl Hernandez
Los Angeles, Calif.

As a negative, interrogative form of *I are*, whose subject-verb agreement surely no usage authority or manual anywhere endorses, *aren't I?* is of course an illogical construction. And yet the authorities both here and in Britain cheerfully accept it in everyday—though on the whole not in formal—usage. What's recommended for formal contexts is indeed your *am I not?*

Only relatively recently has *aren't I?* been welcome in the United States. In the 1936 fourth edition of his classic *The American Language*, H. L. Mencken observed, "*Aren't* has never got a foothold in the American first person; when it is used at all, which is very rarely, it is always as a conscious Britishism." Strange to say, the construction that *aren't I?* has displaced—*ain't I?*—is now regarded as completely illiterate even though it is somewhat more logical, because it can be thought of as a contraction of *am I not?*

Mencken went on to make an argument of a kind that's often heard today with respect to other expressions and words. He wrote, "Facing the alternative of employing the unwieldy '*Am I not in this?*' the American turns boldly to '*Ain't I in this?*' Here, as al-



ways, the popular speech is pulling the exacter speech along, and no one familiar with its successes in the past can have much doubt that it will succeed again, soon or late."

Those of us who sometimes feel that it's hopeless to try to maintain a distinction between standard and colloquial English may be heartened to note that the great Mencken seems to have been wrong in this case. Although he was no doubt right about the overall trend, it's worth remembering that the "popular" version does not always prevail—not even when it is more logical than the imported idiom that takes its place.

The use—or, as I see it, misuse—of *thinly* in constructions like *thinly sliced* bothers me. I cannot conceive of a *thinly* this way. Shouldn't it be *thin sliced* or, better, *sliced thin*? It seems to me that the misuse describes the actions of the slicer rather than the results.

W. S. Penn Jr.
Davis, Calif.

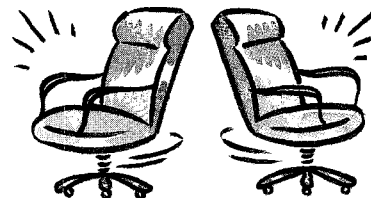
You're quite right that *thin-sliced* is considered better form than *thinly sliced*. But *thin* here is the very same part of speech as *thinly*, each of them being an adverb. As the *American Heritage Dictionary* has been

declaring in every edition from its first, published in 1969, to its brand-new fourth, one of the meanings of the adverb *thin* is "so as to be thin." Go figure. But in fact many adverbs have two forms (*thinly* and *thin*, *thickly* and *thick*, *quickly* and *quick*), the terser of which is standard in combinations: *thick-cut*, *quick-acting*.



Is it all right to call someone a co-chairwoman when the other person doing the chairing is a man—presumably referred to as co-chairman? My friend and I have been arguing about this. He maintains that -woman is an integral part of the title, and that therefore unless the person's counterpart can be identified in the same way, it is objectionable to incorporate into the title the component co-. But I contend that gender is in this case incidental, and is used only to expand on the attributes of the individual filling the role. Which is it?

George Pollack
Brooklyn, N.Y.

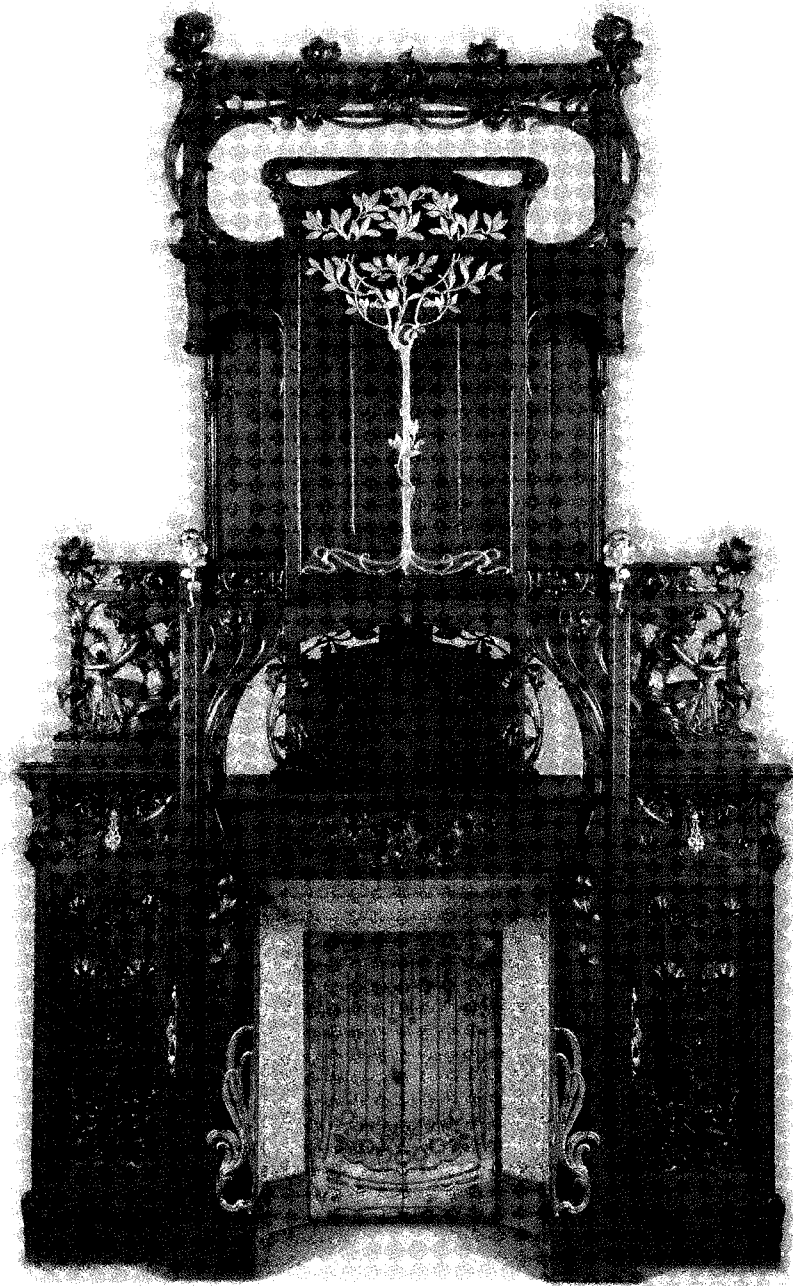


If we as a society are really heading toward gender equity, and yet sometimes find women in positions of authority identified as *chairmen*, maybe it would be good for the male sex if its members were every now and again identified as *chairwomen*, or *co-chairwomen*.

Just kidding. Isn't the situation you're describing exactly what the word *co-chair* is for?

There is often, by the way, reason to look askance at the prefix *co-*, as your friend is doing, for it is regularly used where it is useless. (What's wrong, for instance, with "He and she will be the *chairs* of the committee this year"?) But here *co-* isn't any part of the problem. At any rate, you can't stay out of trouble by referring to the two people together as *chairwomen*—or *chairmen*.

Have you recently had a language dispute that you would like this column to resolve? Write to Word Court in care of *The Atlantic Monthly*, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send e-mail to MsGrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. MsGrammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.



Vittorio Valabrega (Italian, 1861-1952), *Chimneypiece*, 1900, walnut, ceramic, brass, glass; The Mitchell Wolfson Jr. Collection; The Wolfsonian-Florida International University, Miami Beach

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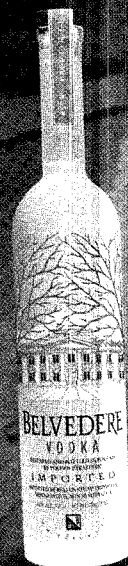
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BELVEDERE CRAFTED USING TRADITIONS OVER 500 YEARS OLD 100% POLISH RYE FOUR TIMES DISTILLED

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